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Lilith

spring 2009
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In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b

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From Austin to Boston and everywhere in between, Jewish women in writing groups are learning to take seriously their skills, themselves, and the bonds that emerge from these homegrown groups. The groups have become safe, intelligent places full of debate, ribaldry, neurosis, semi-colons, and food. Edited by Susan Schnur, with reports from the field by Karen Propp, Shelly R. Fredman, Mara Sokolsky, Esther Mizrachi Moritz and Michelle Brafman

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25 No, Margaret Sanger Wasn't Jewish
by Melissa Klapper
But an astounding number of doctors who pioneered the 20th century's birth control movement were Jewish women! Sometimes arrested for promoting contraception and sex-ed in neighborhood clinics, they paved the way for today's repro-rights activists. Plus… Helen R. Cordes tells us how to mark the 50th anniversary of the Pill.

28 Two Doctors/One Friendship
by Salomea Kape-Jay
The haunting memoir of two survivors who meet in a post-war Polish medical school, and learn in the most devastating way that not all scars are visible, nor can every ailment be treated.

Cover: Eta Wrobel's autobiography, *My Life, My Way: The Extraordinary Memoir of a Jewish Partisan in WWII Poland* is avaliable at amazon.com. Image ©2005 Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation

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Lilith

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Walking toward the Lilith office on a cold, wintry day last month, I noticed a woman in a nondescript old coat and flip-flops leaning against a Macdonald's trash can unwrapping her bandaged foot. My heart went out to her, a person without even a pair of sneakers against the bitter weather. And then, as I got closer, thinking I should offer her help, or some money, I saw what she was tossing into the trash: the tissues wound between her toes from her recent pedicure. (Pedicure! Not homeless!)

There's more.

I later heard that a woman I know—who always looks pretty presentable, I hasten to add—was waiting for a friend outside a Manhattan bookstore with her cooling coffee in her hand when suddenly she heard a splash. A concerned passerby had dropped a quarter into her paper cup.

Financial anxieties skew the way we see the world right now. We're all worried about money—earning it, spending it, investing it, giving it away. And now the woman with the open paper cup also has to worry whether she looks like someone who has lost it all.

It's no laughing matter. We've certainly felt the pain at Lilith these past six months. As an independent nonprofit, Lilith is supported largely by tax-deductible contributions from generous readers, plus foundation grants (subscription revenue covers less than one-third of Lilith's budget). So we worry every day about how to sustain Lilith's work, bringing you fine writing and women's voices with narratives you hear nowhere else.

But I have to tell you that even while I've been worrying my way through the most uncertain time that Lilith has ever faced, I've been repeating to myself the many things Lilith has learned (and written) about women's tzedakah, our charitable giving. Here's the mantra:

When the economy turns down, *women keep on giving, knowing that the causes they care about need to be sustained even through a downturn.* Many men stop giving, uneasy about not being able to contribute at their previous levels. Women continue to write checks.

Women give where they know their money has an impact—often boldly funding smaller groundbreaking projects—like Lilith.

Women draw others into causes they care about, and honor other women when they give. This explains the number of women who give Lilith gift subscriptions; the magazine provides a way to share an enjoyable experience. And making your contribution in honor of, or in memory of, a woman who has influenced you is another way of recognizing how related we feel to other women: friends, relatives, mentors.

Giving money is empowering—and not because others honor you for your contributions. Each of us feels instrumental when we support causes that we know make a difference. With your contribution to Lilith you're helping shape the world for yourself and for a next generation of daughters and nieces, students and friends.

Where you give tzedakah is a marker of your identity. You've heard it before, and it's still true: anyone looking into your checkbook gets a vivid mental snapshot of who you are. The checks you write reveal your values.

Mother's Day is coming up. So are graduations and other celebratory moments. Use these occasions as a chance to give tzedakah in honor of, or in memory of, women you know who have made a difference in your life. Give a woman a gift that has meaning—a charitable contribution in her honor.

women, money & power

When you support Lilith you gain in three ways. You have honored someone, you've empowered yourself, and—maybe most important—you know that you're fueling an engine that drives positive change for Jewish women everywhere.

If you love the magazine, its website, the Lilith salons, the Lilith Blog, and what you learn in these pages, please give generously now.

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And for fun: with our huge thanks for your contribution of $360 or more, we'll send you this dramatic tote-bag. You'll feel powerful carrying it.

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

Jews Everywhere, Now on Film

A documentary film company run by **Ellen Friedland** sees its mission as documenting "unfolding" Jewish stories, and turning them into "educational programs on Jewish culture around the world." Since 1997, JEMGLO (Jewish Education Multimedia Global Learning Outreach) has been making films on everything from Swiss Jewry's attempt to deal with its own WWII history to a special Israeli/Palestinian coexistence school to the story of unusual coffee. This last documentary, finished in 2008, focuses on the Mirembe Kawomera ("delicious peace") organic coffee cooperative in Uganda, which brings together over 500 farmers—Christians, Muslims and Abayudayah Jews—to cultivate Fair Trade beans that are distributed in the United States by Thanksgiving Coffee. Working for Jewish culture both on and off the screen, JEMGLO also supports the Simcha Jewish Culture Festival in Wroclaw, Poland, known for fostering current Polish-Jewish works and creative endeavors.

JEMGLO producer Friedland, 51, speaks of the inspiration and passion for justice she learned from her European-born grandparents, her "religiously liberal" Jewish upbringing and the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment she witnessed first-hand growing up. Friedland says these values spur her desire to find "the documentary that wants to be made, a story in need of an audience."

Upcoming JEMGLO projects include expanding a Czech documentary film examining the "mysterious 1967 murder in Prague of Charles Jordan, an executive at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee," and bringing it to American audiences. The company is also developing a series of film shorts that they'll make available exclusively online, so viewers can learn, says Friedland, about "a whole host of global Jewish subjects." Send her your ideas and comments via *www.jemglo.org*.

MELANIE WEISS

"Although there is a fantastic tradition of strong Jewish women in so many endeavors, the truth is that in my entire serious soccer career, there have been few if any Jewish women on my teams, or among my opponents. In a way that has helped me to strengthen my own identity, and to drive home how special it is to combine my Jewish heritage with sports."

Yael Averbuch, Drafted to Sky Blue FC, the NJ/NY franchise of Women's Professional Soccer

Women Rabbis Rising

In a dramatic first, in March **Sara Hurwitz** had "conferred" upon her the rank of rabbi in the Orthodox world. She will serve, she says, "as a full member of the clergy." But you'll have to remember to call her "MaHaRaT." That's for "Manhiga Hilchatit Ruchanit Toranit"—Jewish legal and spiritual leader and Torah teacher. Talmud scholar **Rabbi Judith Hauptman** says she's "disappointed that a woman functioning the same way as a man is not called a rabbi."

Madoff Who?

While many traditional Jewish philanthropic organizations are in disarray as the economy falters and scandal shocks, three young Jewish women are proving that ingenuity and dedication may be more effective than an endowment or an investment portfolio.

At 12, **Talia Leman** barely squeaks into the category of Jewish *women*. Leman responded to hurricanes Katrina and Rita by organizing a campaign to trick-or-treat for coins to help victims. That project spurred the creation of RandomKid (*randomkid.org*), which directs youngsters' to social justice causes. RandomKid operates as a clearinghouse and provides pre-teens interested in activism with resources like loans, education and project development help. Leman, the C.E.O. (perhaps this country's youngest), is actively involved with training and motivating her age-mates.

At a homelessness awareness event in October: Stern College for Women students and members of Yeshiva University's Social Justice Society with friends.

Like Leman, **Shlomit Cohen**, 21, of Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women, facilitates her peers' engagement in the world. Cohen, a senior, is president of the college's Social Justice Society, which hosts educational events on such topics as agunot, Darfur, human trafficking, conflict diamonds and the emerging new kosher-justice certification Hekhsher Tzedek, along with volunteer projects like weekly food packaging and trips to a community center for homeless people. Cohen plans to be a social worker, specializing in domestic violence in faith-based communities. "We have a responsibility, first of all as human beings, but also very much as Jews," to do such work.

Sivan Achor-Borowich, the 30-year-old founder of Jewish Heart for Africa (*jhasol.org*), shares this passion. Borowich—who describes herself emphatically as "*not* a non-profit person"—happened to be working for the United Nations Development Program in Senegal in early 2008 when she made the connection between much of Africa's poverty and its lack of electricity.

An Israeli-American familiar with Israel's pioneering work in solar energy, she realized that one of Africa's most abundant resources—sunlight—could be the solution. Thanks to her, now in Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania Israeli solar-power technology and equipment produce electricity for schools, medical clinics, water pumps and a synagogue. The impact of this initiative has been tremendous: villages have clean water, clinics can store vaccines that need to be refrigerated and children have more time for school since they do not need to spend their days gathering water and wood. Thousands of Africans' quality of life has improved, and at the same time the project bolsters Israel's economy and image. Seventeen projects have been completed in a year, affirming Achor-Borowich's confidence that "even a small idea can be developed into something meaningful." Her current involvement seems quite simple to her; it's motivated, she says, by her understanding that "people are in need, and we have the tools to help them. With very little we can do a lot."

SHIRA BISTRICER

Her Career Move from Pain to Pleasure

"You see? This is what happens when you don't use sex toys," 38-year-old **Beverley Damelin** joked, motioning to her burgeoning belly. Arrayed in front of the visibly pregnant Damelin were vibrators, all of which were for sale. But ratcheting up profits was not her goal for the evening. Unlike most sex-toy parties (think Tupperware soirees with dildos), this gathering in a Jerusalem apartment was about education. Damelin was there to teach the assembled women about female sexuality. And for the first time in her five years of running these seminars, Palestinian women sat with their Israeli counterparts as she launched into her spiel about orgasms.

Before anyone starts touting the vibrator as the solution to the decades-long conflict in the Middle East (or suggests that U.S. aid to the region be invested in sex shops), it is important to note that the Palestinians did not speak up throughout the session. Nor did they purchase any products. "They were not there to coexist," insists the South African-born Damelin. Like the Israelis, they were there simply to explore their sexuality with the help of a professional.

Since arriving in Israel 19 years ago, Damelin, who lives with her partner Shlomi in Tel Aviv, has earned a BA in Psychology from Tel Aviv University and a Masters in Public Health from Hebrew University. She is also certified as a Sexuality Educator by the Israeli Planned Parenthood Federation. But her career, which began at a rape crisis center, has evolved from pain to pleasure. "I was working with a lot of the pathological sides of sex: disease, unwanted pregnancy, rape. [I thought] that maybe the way to deal with these things is not by talking about negatives, such as saying, 'Don't rape,' but talking about the way it [sex] should happen," she says in her Anglo accent.

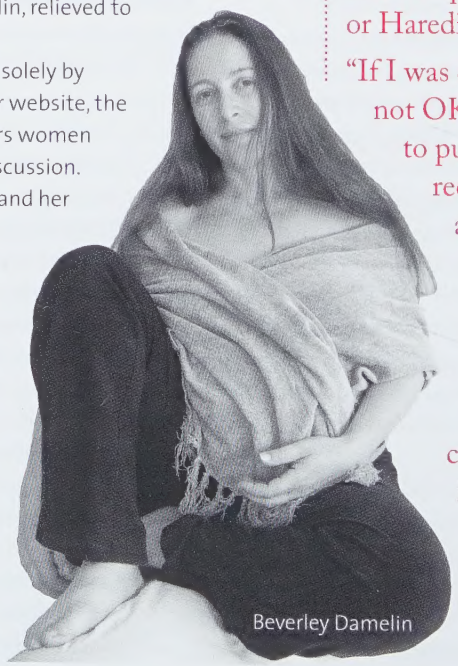
Which in Damelin's opinion is any way you want to do it so long as you're not hurting yourself or another. One of her goals is to celebrate sexual diversity, and she is admittedly peeved when less-trained sex-toy saleswomen reduce women's preferences to pat statements in order to push merchandise. "They say things like, 'Women like X,' or 'Oral sex is X,'" she notes. Damelin views the toys as simply a way of jumpstarting the conversation and thinks it's important to leave space for everyone's likes and dislikes. Especially since the women who attend her classes are often nervous at first and are trying to discover if they're "normal."

"They want to know if they're doing it right," she says. After a discussion about female ejaculation, a woman approached Damelin, relieved to know that her bladder wasn't broken.

In addition to the groups, news of which are spread solely by word of mouth, Damelin also informs the public via her website, the Dinah Project (*www.dinahproject.com*), where she offers women positive sexual information and an online forum for discussion.

Damelin's future goals are modest. She hopes to expand her groups from one-time-only events to extended series in order to delve deeper into Israeli sexual mores and taboos. And though she insists her parties are not part of a grander plan for Mideast peace, she hopes that meetings such as that one in Jerusalem are a good place to start. "The Palestinian women were actively listening," she says. Perhaps in the Israeli women's comments and questions they heard something familiar, some common ground, and that might be enough, at least to start. Damelin notes hopefully, "When change comes, it will be the women who bring it." No pun intended. But not unwelcome.

DVORA MEYERS



Beverley Damelin

When **Michal**, 28, opened her apartment door one Saturday night in June, she was expecting to find a client for her hair design business. Instead the Israeli divorcee, who left the Orthodox fold some three years earlier, found several ultra-Orthodox Jewish men. They threw her on the floor, gagged her, kicked her all over her body and questioned her relations with men, according to official accounts. After they beat her for at least 10 minutes, they warned her this was "just the beginning" and that if she continued to live there she would be killed.

Prosecutors filed charges in August against a 28-year-old man accused of being paid $2,000 by a vigilante organization or "modesty squad" active in the religious Jerusalem neighborhoods of Mea Shearim and Geula for helping perpetrate the attack. Prosecutors say the goal of the group, dubbed the "Haredi modesty patrol," is to enforce community norms and conventions regarding modest attire and comportment in ultra-Orthodox, or Haredi, neighborhoods.

"If I was doing something that was not OK, God has enough ways to punish me," Michal fumed recently in an interview at a Jerusalem coffee shop. "They don't have to take the law into their own hands. Who made himself God's policeman? Who has God given the right to come and beat someone in his name?"

Brenda Gazzar, from "'Modesty Squad' Faces Legal Scrutiny in Israel," Women's E-news, Dec. 1, 2008

Left: **Barbara Margolies** (second from right) meets with a patient in a room at the National Hospital in Niamey, Niger. Fistula patients include Haoua (second from left) and Mariama (far right), who now works as a nurse's aide for IOWD. Right: Binta, who was cut by a medicine man to please her husband, has undergone surgery but remains in the hospital where she still suffers from stress incontinence.

Repairing Trauma in Niger

Barbara Margolies has taken a few leaps in her life. From elementary-school teacher, to children's book author, to intrepid world traveler. When you ask the Brooklyn-born mother of two how in 2003, at age 63, she began dedicating herself to helping African women suffering terrible physical and psychological wounds from obstetric complications, she shrugs. "Maybe because I'm crazy?"

Crazy or otherwise, Margolies's philanthropic efforts have dramatically improved the lives of hundreds of young women in Niger, the West African nation where Margolies worked training English teachers through the U.S. State Department, and where she learned of a severe gynecological problem afflicting girls and women after childbirth in many poor countries, but disproportionately in impoverished Niger, where medical care is woefully inadequate.

There are fewer than 25 obstetrician/gynecologists serving more than six and a half million women in Niger, according to the Ministry of Health, and one midwife for every 33,500. Niger has the world's highest estimated risk of maternal mortality: one in seven. For these malnourished women, laboring through childbirth, sometimes for up to a week, without proper care can be a misery. During such painful, attenuated births, the baby's head presses against the mother's vaginal wall, the wall adjacent to both bladder and rectum, preventing blood-flow to the area, causing a breakdown of the surrounding tissue. This creates what amounts to a hole in the pelvis, known as an obstetric fistula.

Women who survive childbirth with fistulas are left with little or no control over bladder and bowels, their psychological trauma compounding the physical damage. Eighty-five percent of babies born to fistula patients are stillborn; on top of this loss, the women are frequently ostracized by their families and communities because of the odors associated with the leakage. (Non-obstetric fistulas are rare, but do occur, as in a 14-year-old who had been raped when she was 10, and a 20-year-old who was "cut" by a medicine man to make her more sexually pliant for her husband.)

"It blew my mind that this could happen, and still be happening in 2003," Margolies says. "I thought, I cannot walk away and live with myself. I have to do something."

Within a year, with the help of supporters in Niger and the U.S., she founded The International Organization for Women and Development, a non-profit based in Rockville Center, NY, with its primary goal to create a self-sustaining program to repair and rehabilitate fistula women in Niger. Three times a year, IOWD coordinates the transport of 20 to 25 volunteer surgeons, doctors and nurses from the U.S. to a hospital in Niger's capital, Niamey, where dozens of fistula women live at any given time. There, the surgeons perform roughly 65 surgeries each visit and pass on their skills and knowledge to Nigerien surgeons. In four years, IOWD physicians have performed more than 1,000 surgeries, with an overall success rate of 80 percent.

Along with medical care, Margolies has launched an outreach program to educate patients and their husbands about the causes of fistula; a laparoscopic surgical program at the local maternity hospital; and a vocational initiative that encourages patients to support themselves financially by making jewelry, and surgical caps and bed sheets for the hospital wards. (More at *nigerfistula.org*)

Some of the women, even when healed, continue to live in the hospital courtyard, says Margolies. Some have no place to go because their husbands have divorced them or taken up with other wives. Others are loath to return to their husbands and abandon the camaraderie and support they find at the hospital.

Margolies is quick to sing the praises of the volunteer doctors (a measure of her success is that there's a five-year waiting list for surgeons lining up to serve), but modest about her own achievements. "I'm not anybody special," she explains. "I'm just a normal Jewish lady who was fortunate enough to have experienced life in different parts of the world, and to know who I am."

ELIZABETH S. BENNETT

Educated working women struggle to fulfill—with not enough help from husbands and almost none from society—the demands of man-size jobs while satisfying standards of motherhood that have become so exacting the Virgin Mary herself would call for a martini.

Katha Pollitt, from "Barack Obama, Feminist in Chief?" The Nation, Dec 8, 2008

Egg Cream, and a Side of Sushi

As a lifelong New Yorker and former chef and caterer who now directs the Graduate Program for Food Studies and Food Management at NYU, Professor **Jennifer Berg** knows her way around Big Apple cuisine. **Leah Koenig** caught up with Berg about Jewish food's glory days, and why sushi might be the new knish.

Your dissertation was titled *From Pushcarts Peddlers to Gourmet Take-Out: New York City's Iconic Foods of Jewish Origin, 1920 to 2005*. How did you end up with this subject?

I wanted to focus on how people use food as a marker of identity, and began to think about the aspects of my identity that are most central to my life. I am a woman, I am a Jew and I am a New Yorker. Guilty as charged. I tend to assume that life revolves around New York.

This project started with the question, "What foods do people most associate with New York City? For a year or two, the same answers kept coming up: bagels, knishes, egg creams, deli, cheesecake and pizza. Aside from pizza, they were all "Jewish foods."

Why does Jewish food signify "New York"? Or vice versa?

New York is this epicenter of grand cuisine, so I tried to figure out why it would define itself with pedestrian foods like the egg cream or knish. I spent an entire summer looking in cultural publications from the 1920s to the 70s—like the *Forward* and *The Brooklyn Eagle*. Aside from ads for catering halls, the only mention of food was things like, "Ira and Hettie Katz hosted a fundraising event. The food was abundant." It was all about quantity and never about specifics.

Meanwhile, I was interviewing all of these 85-year-old men about their recollections of growing up in New York. They talked incessantly about food, like it was the only thing in life that mattered. They had countless nostalgic stories from the 1930s and 40s about drinking egg creams after school, or on dates. Then there was this odd dearth of Jewish food memories for a while. They began talking about eating these foods again later in life—having bagels and lox with their grandkids. I realized that their food patterns mirrored the acculturation pattern of the time.

I broke it up into three eras: Genesis: Life on the Lower East Side, Exodus: Mass Suburban Migration and *Aliyah*: The Cultural Return. In the first era, they ate foods that were inexpensive and easy to acquire, but I do not think they had any symbolic value yet. The egg cream replicated the thick, American chocolate malted they could not afford, so drinking egg creams probably made them feel more American, not Jewish.

In the second era, which coincided with white flight to the suburbs, people stopped consuming the traditional Jewish food. Why eat bagels and smelly fish when you can have Wonder Bread like your Presbyterian neighbors?

In the third phase, as Jews found their way up the socio-economic ladder, it was suddenly chic to slum it again with super-ethnic foods. Their nostalgia, which is essentially memories without anything negative attached, kicked in. Egg creams did not represent a time when they were poor. Instead, they represented the memories of a close-knit community. They were able to embrace the past at a comfortable distance.

If Jewish food's iconic status is fading in New York, what will the next foods be?

A great question. We're in a cataclysmic change right now in terms of immigration. There was enormous change in the 1880s and 1920s, but essentially only three groups came over: the Irish, Italians, and Jews. Now, there is no majority immigrant group, just a plethora of minority groups moving here. I don't know what the next iconic food is going to be. I sort of think it might be sushi.

Which is funny, because sushi is itself becoming something of a "Jewish food." You now find it on the menu at every kosher restaurant, from a pizza shop to a steakhouse.

That's significant. There's something exotic about sushi, and Jews have always embraced the exotic, the worldly and the cosmopolitan. I remember being blown away the first time I saw sushi at a bar mitzvah. These days, it is absolutely commonplace.

Regular attendance at religious services reduces the risk of death for women by 20 percent, according to a new study.... Those who said they attended religious services at least once a week showed a 20 percent mortality risk reduction compared with those not attending services at all. The study did not attempt to measure spirituality; its authors stress that it examined self-reported measures of religiosity.... "Interestingly, the protection against mortality provided by religion cannot be entirely explained by expected factors that include enhanced social support of friends or family, lifestyle choices and reduced smoking and alcohol consumption," said Dr. Eliezer Schnall, the lead author of the study. "There is something here that we don't quite understand. It is always possible that some unknown or unmeasured factors confounded these results."

from "Study: Attending services cuts women's death risk," JTA, Nov 25, 2008

In its new package of rule changes, the U.S. House of Representatives has finally decided to make its official language gender neutral, recognizing the growing representation of women in Congress (including as Speaker of the House). Gone are references to "he," "chairman," and phrases such as "his duties."

from thinkprogress.org, Jan 6, 2009

Clearly, an excited now-President Obama was thrilled to meet Lilith's senior editor Susan Schnur in Fall 2007.

"Returnships"

For women who've decided to step away from their professions for a few years while caring for young children or elderly parents—but don't want to lose ground when they do return to the workforce—figuring out an appropriate strategy can be tricky.

Enter "returnships." Similar in concept to career internships for high school or college students, returnships for professionals offer a way to make the on-ramp easier for women who've been at home. At food giant Sara Lee, the program is designed "to provide opportunities for mid-career individuals re-entering the workforce after having been away for a number of years." What makes it work? Flexible, challenging assignments that recognize the conventional 9–5 approach may no longer be feasible.

Now the Jewish community is getting on board too. Recently the Jewish Communal Service Association Networking Parents Group sponsored a conference call about returnships, specifically in the Jewish world.

"When I do re-enter the field, it shouldn't be 'Who are you and what do you do?'" said **Ann Luban**, founding co-chair of the group, launched in 2003. A social worker and mother, Luban was eager to develop a program to help other women in similar circumstances. "I was looking to retain my professional connection," she said. "I'm committed to Jewish communal service."

"JCCs are a great place to return to the field, because they're always looking for part-time people," said **Lynne Kanner**, the group's current chair, who works 10 hours a week.

Leslie Rosen Stern, a social worker now doing admissions work at her local Solomon Schechter school, describes returnships as "a win-win for the agencies and the professionals. The agencies gain highly trained professionals who know how to run a program or a budget, and the individuals find ways to engage." In an e-mail message, Stern added, "Jewish organizations reap the benefits of experienced Jewish communal professionals, while also opening themselves up to a 'mutual testing of the waters' for the employer and the employee."

MERRI ROSENBERG

For more information: *www.jcsana.org* or *info@jcsana.org*. Subscribe to the Networking Parents listserv by sending an email to *JCSAnetworkingparents-subscribe@yahoogroups.com*.

JEWISH WOMEN'S WRITING GROUPS:

What We Write and Talk About In a shared Room of Our Own

In the rapid-fire world we live in, more and more people are desperate for contemplative experience. Yoga and meditation, the slow-food movement, eco-living—all are drawing women in. **Even more popular is writing:** especially memoir. From San Francisco to Atlanta, workshops are proliferating, and they're packed with Jewish women. A lot of us seem to love writing about our lives as a means of thinking about, integrating and making sense (and art) of our experience. In shared rooms of our own we are thriving...and accomplishing a lot: writers' groups not only give us intelligent, empathic readers and friends of similar kidney, but deadlines, too—a gift not to be underestimated by dreamy procrastinators.

Jewish women are pretty gifted at yakking and offering support, at sharing intimacies and food, at working hard and taking—and giving!—criticism. That we are diving into writers' groups seems a natural.

What follows is an inside look at five writing groups. We thought you'd like a peek behind the scenes. Two "how-to's" are intended to help readers who think they might like to start their own.

– Susan Schnur

Believing in Ourselves:
"If You Can Write It, I Can Write It, Too." BY KAREN PROPP

BOSTON

A LONG TIME AGO, I WAS A GRADUATE STUDENT in a university Creative Writing program. I was 26 and desperately wanted to become a writer. On the first day that the Poetry Workshop met, I arrived early and found myself alone in the room with the Famous Poet teacher. I sat down and tried to think of what to say. Here was my chance to have a minute's private audience with the Famous Poet about my work. I knew my poem would be discussed by the class that day—"workshopped"—and I vacillated between a trembling fear that my poem (and I) would be judged stupid, and an exalted hope that it (and I) would be deemed brilliant.

"In a single evening we might cover one writer's ob-gyn visit, another's new love interest, bio-diesel fuel, an alderman's race, and kitchen linoleum."

The Famous Poet fastened his electric-blue eyes on mine. "About your poem—"

I leaned forward to glean every pearly drop of wisdom.

"You can't use *that* word in a poem," he said.

"What word?"

"Vagina." He said it quickly and with some distaste. For emphasis, he raised a long, tapered palm in the air, and let it fall—slap—on the desk at which he sat.

I felt scared and shattered, but summoned up a rather smug retort. "I didn't use *that* word."

The Famous Poet looked momentarily stunned. I could see the wheels turn in his head. Had he read it wrong? Did he have me confused with another student?

"The word I used," I said, "was 'ovaries'."

"Oh. Well—not that word either." He shook his head as if trying to rid his mind of these strictly female, verboten words.

I sank into my chair. The other students filed in. I no longer remember what else was said about my poem that day. It wouldn't matter. The Famous Poet had already pronounced it wrong. What took root in me was the knowledge that the Famous Poet (and his male writer-peers) ruled what language was and was not permissible for me to use. There were other rules, too. While a piece was being workshopped the writer had to remain silent. We students competed to deliver the sharpest, most cutting criticism. Whatever you had tried to say or do in a particular piece was irrelevant. If you wanted to become a writer you had to learn that the only thing that mattered was what was on the page.

I excelled in my writing program. This had a lot to do with my ability to discern what would please the Famous Poet. It was only after I graduated that my writing problems began. Without the Famous Poet's judgments and opinions I no longer knew what I wanted to say or how I should say it. I drifted. I doubted. I despaired.

And then, by chance and good fortune, I found myself in a writers' group. We were four or five or six women from our

mid-20s to our late-40s. We met every Thursday night in one another's homes. Creative Writing program survivors all, we consciously sculpted our group against the critical norms under which we'd come of age as writers. We were supportive first, critical second. If someone was experiencing a life crisis, that person got the floor. We talked about obstacles to writing (time; money; fear; depression) as much as we talked about writing. The rule was you could talk about any topic as long as it held strong feelings for you. Fun and interesting were other prerequisites. In a single evening, we might cover one writer's gynecological visit, another writer's job offer, terrorism, a tantrum-ing child, bio-diesel fuel, a local alderman's race, kitchen linoleum, weight loss or gain, a new or old love interest, psychiatric medications—the free-ranging, ribald, and honest conversation in which women have always engaged in spaces where they feel safe.

Although our group tended to be comprised of mostly Jewish women, we were not ostensibly a Jewish women's writers' group. Yet you could say it displayed Jewish characteristics: uninhibited display of neurotic tendencies; well-honed analytic and storytelling skills; vigorous debate; abundant food; preoccupations with family relationships. And an intangible quality that seems the provenance of both Jews and writers: the sense that something is not entirely real until it's down on paper.

What about standards, excellence and hard work? How does a gal gaggle turn out published, award-winning work? Here's what I did not learn in graduate school. Stuff that's not on the page—writer talk—really matters. That's the arena where a writer hashes out her passions, discovers her voice, learns to fight for her subject. Men have always known this. Historically, they've found safe, public places in which to relax, like the British pub or the Viennese café, where they can discuss, debate, and joke. Women historically have had the kitchen, a place where conversation must compete with cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Writers' groups, comprising several hours uninterrupted time, are a contemporary invention, akin to the kaffee klatch, slumber party, and ladies' night out.

In a writers' group, a person can find profoundly essential mirrors, and if the writer happens to be a Jewish woman, it's perhaps easier (though not necessary) to see herself in another Jewish woman. In my strong-bonded, long-term group, we all learn from and are shaped by the others. Writing styles and topics may coincide in the natural cross-fertilization that occurs, but much more important is to see how another writer handles the challenges of a writer's life. Seeing a friend continue to believe in her work after 18 publishers' rejections is heartening. Watching another friend churn out 300 pages is a challenge worth taking up. Hearing that a third friend has rented a room in which to write is inspiring. Always the refrain is: *If she can do it, I can do it too.* ■

Karen Propp is the author of two memoirs and the co-editor of Why I'm Still Married: Women Write Their Hearts Out on Love, Loss, Sex, and Who Does the Dishes. *Her writing group meets in Cambridge and Somerville, Massachusetts.*

HOW ONE GROUP WORKS

Sharpening Our Pencils: Jewish Text Comes First... then Adrienne Rich

BY SHELLY R. FREDMAN

NEW YORK

I TEACH A WEEKLY, TWO-HOUR WRITING CLASS TO NINE WOMEN and one man at the Skirball Center at Temple Emanu-El on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Skirball is exceptional for its commitment to teaching Judaism through the arts. It employs a visual artist to teach Jewish texts through drawing, painting and sculpture, and it employs me to do the same through writing.

I start each class by teaching a Jewish text—either something that the rabbi has given me and the visual arts teacher to work from, or—increasingly—something I come up with myself. After 30 minutes of discussing, say, Leviticus 19:1-18, "You shall not wholly reap the corners of your field"—during which I might offer some ancient context, rabbinic commentary or a dollop of contemporary critique—we sharpen our pencils for the integrative work to come: "What does 'not reaping the corners of your field' mean to *you*?" I might ask my students. "Are there things you possess that you never use? That you keep explicitly for others? Are there things you use entirely yourself, but perhaps shouldn't? What corners of *your* field remain ungleaned?" The writers work for 10 minutes, pulling from their own personal experience and committed to enlarging their lives by connecting them to sacred text.

Joseph Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith* always inspires interesting work. In the first chapter, Soloveitchik describes the two versions of the biblical Adam—Adam 1 and Adam 2—found in Genesis's two disparate Creation stories. We write about the "Adam 1" part of ourselves—the part

that "masters" and "dominates"—and the "Adam 2" part of ourselves—the part that is "pure being." One student (who, at 90-plus, is my oldest) wrote about herself at midnight. After her therapist's practice is over and she has spoken to each of her children, she explained, she takes out her Adam 2—"pure being"—and chats with her long-deceased husband.

When we studied Exodus 6:6-7—"and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm"—one woman connected it to the experience of fainting on a New York subway and awakening in the hands of nearby, solicitous commuters. Another, when we studied the Havdalah blessings that speak of a God who "separates between holy and unholy, between light and dark," connected the prayer to the Before and After moments when her daughter, crossing a street in Cambridge, MA, was hit by a car. When we studied the biblical text in which King Solomon, immediately after building the Temple in Jerusalem, asks, "But will God really dwell on Earth? Even the Heavens …cannot contain You," a woman with a super-palatial, Upper East Side apartment wrote of being 10 and discovering a "sanctuary" of climactic forest and swamp in Lexington, MA.

During the second hour of our class, we "workshop," with kindness, each other's manuscripts. Our work is generally material that has grown from classroom exercises and is being developed and polished. At the end of the year we publish a booklet. Tobi Kahn's class and mine stage an art show and reading.

So what happens in these classes, after we study sacred text and then read aloud our truths and desires, our secrets and doubts, one voice layered upon another? Well. It starts to sound like prayer. We end up in a place that everyday conversation rarely touches. When you are given only 10 minutes in which to put your newly generated thoughts down, trolling them through the 3,500-year-old collective wisdom of the Jewish people, you tend to outdo yourself. The process forces us beyond what we thought we knew about our stories, our lives, our world.

"One writer connects *Exodus 6:6* with the time she fainted on a New York subway."

This is not a memoir class, I must say. I have taught memoir in university settings, and what distinguishes this class is that, first and foremost, we're interrogating ancient Jewish text. The deep brilliance of the texts and the playfulness of the rabbinic imagination stand behind us, with us. The text becomes our Muse. And that tends to take us further in, beyond where we could go by simply documenting our lives.

Look. People in our rushing world don't have time to sit with a thought, to look at their lives through a sacred lens, through a lens that's not ironic and isolating. This class is about wrestling with some of life's most important questions. In the process we become a deeply bonded community.

Adrienne Rich has said that women (and, I have to add, the occasional man) tend to be more willing "to dive into the wreck." Deep down, where the treasure is. Perhaps women know best the urgency for that other Torah—the one still being written today. ■

Shelly R. Fredman teaches writing at Skirball and Barnard College. Her work has appeared in Lilith, Best Jewish Writing 2002, *The Chicago Tribune Magazine and elsewhere.*

After Laura Died
The Last Writers' Group

BY MARA SOKOLSKY

PROVIDENCE

A THICK, HEAVY SNOW HAD FALLEN THE NIGHT BEFORE and by morning the air was icy. I shook the snow from my boots and gingerly entered the funeral home. I was a little surprised to be escorted to a dark, open space in the basement, where Ava and Diane already sat, huddled in their coats. It seems another body was laid out in the prep room, and until Laura could be ritually washed, she was waiting her turn in a tall refrigerator unit that sat in this space near the garage. The funeral home wasn't used to people sitting there, but because Ava and Diane wanted to be as close to Laura as possible, the funeral director dutifully brought out folding chairs and a small heater, and my writing colleagues positioned themselves in front of the refrigerator.

I dragged in a third folding chair to help form a circle. Now we were complete. We began by singing a Yiddish song that I'd sung to Laura over and over when she'd been lying on her daybed in the living room, eyes closed, toward the end.

When Laura's cancer came back, it wasn't hard to change our monthly meetings to accommodate her chemotherapy schedule. We were a pretty informal group anyway. Sometimes we brought copies of our finished pieces, and other times we read from scribbled notes, torn hastily out of a notebook. Though we loved our writers' group, it was understood that family life and work came first, and we were just impressed when any of us had the time to actually compose something.

Our group was first conceived in 1997. By that time, both my daughters were attending a Jewish day school and I was ready to go back to my early love of writing. Toward that end I found myself at a day-long writing seminar. It was held on a Saturday, at a local church. I remember feeling funny about being in church on Shabbat. At the far end of the meeting space, I noticed another mother

I had chatted with casually outside my kids' school.

After the seminar, I walked over to her and found that she also was uncomfortable being in such a place on this day. We left the building together. On a whim, and more for dramatic flair than because I had any real idea what it entailed, I remarked, "Hey, do you want to start a writers' group?"

"Sure," she responded. "What do we need to do?"

I didn't really know, but I suggested that she think of someone else who might be interested and so would I, and that four members would be a good beginning.

It was. We started off meeting once a month, around someone's dining table or perched on living room couches. It turned out we were four Jewish women.

On the days when no one brought in anything to read, we chatted about our children, our childhoods, and sometimes our spiritual purpose. In our more productive months, we gravitated toward different genres. Ava brought in stories with a dark, decidedly offbeat flavor. Diane crafted vignettes from snippets of memory and occasionally tried her hand at a poem. I wrote personal essays about navigating my way through the brambles of grownup life. Laura, the child of Holocaust survivors, wrote poetry that often wound itself back to that primal loss, and to subsequent ones: her father's early death, her mother's illness, her own struggle to get well. As a group, we were definitely more poignant than funny. Needing tissues after hearing a piece was considered a good sign.

None of us had known Laura well when she was first diagnosed, which was long before the group started. Yet we had images from the poetry she brought in:

> This journey unasked for:
> waters loud and shaking
> I stay afloat in a *tayva*
> woven with get-well notes
> and casseroles…
> Messages left like medicine
> on my answering machine

We knew she'd gone through treatment, worn bright headscarves, come out healthy. That was more than five years ago. So we weren't prepared to hear one day, sitting with banana muffins and two typed stories before us, that the cancer had spread to her bones. She would have chemotherapy again, she said calmly. This time, she and her husband were going to a macrobiotic center to learn how that diet could help: they'd heard too many testimonials not to give it a try.

Our meetings continued. Laura brought in more poems now than before.

On Taking Laura Seriously

LAURA CHAKRIN CABLE'S "REAL" JOB WAS AS A CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER, and she struggled with the idea of taking herself seriously as a "writer." After she died, her family "kept stumbling across her poems, left tucked away in unlikely places—in files, in between outdated tax forms, in notebooks left on bookshelves throughout the house, in boxes in the attic," writes her daughter Anna in her afterword to *Crossing the Stream: Poems by Laura Chakrin Cable*, a tender, fastidious book that Laura's writers' group edited and brought to press after her death. Laura's husband Rob filled two shopping bags with these "found" poems and dropped them off with the writers' group. For the next few months, the women read poem after poem: Yes, no, maybe. They always lit two candles to welcome Laura's spirit to guide them, "just as we would welcome the Sabbath bride on Friday night," they note in the book's Foreword.

Laura had been the child of Holocaust survivors, but in life she'd been reluctant to share poems that spoke to the intensity of that experience. Some of these poems appear in *Crossing the Stream*, along with explicit poems called "Stage IV Breast Cancer," "Biological Clock," and "Why Is It Women Who Always Lose Their Voices?"

In the final days of Laura's life, Anna writes, "when I learned how to hook up IV tubes and read aloud to my mother as she had once read to me…[we] talked less often about shopping, weight, politics. More often than we ever had, curled up together with the pages spread around us on her bed, we read her poetry."

"Spirits sing/in sadness, inside me, incessantly—" one poem runs. *"Delight!/in the forest/in our memory/You will find a true path!/… I pray for cleansing,/purity of purpose;/I cross the stream."*

Coterminous with the year of mourning ending, a first-rate volume, *Crossing the Stream: Poems by Laura Chakrin Cable*, was published. Below, a sample.

–Susan Schnur

TRANSFERRING EDDIE'S HOURS

I'd listened for years:
Dad had drowned on an August beach,
Mom then threatened their fractured home.
Eddie's booze, cocaine, the black dog.
Sobriety, degree, job, woman, child.

Tests, lapses, moving on.
Hour beyond hour I'd held
a steady mirror to his boyish cheeks
and budding heart, those eyes
that desired tomorrow—

Till today, and my disclosure:
"Unfortunately, my diagnosis
is serious and uncertain.
And so we must find you another
therapist with more hours."

After quiet, he replied,
"Will you have more hours, later?"

Truth ruptured.
My jaws spasmed, my eyes spit.
I'm sorry, I didn't mean this
to happen, the quiver of lips,
the tissues.

I never meant this,
To have holes in my
spine, my hold,
my hours.

[Note: Crossing the Stream is available for $15 from: Temple Emanuel, 99 Taft Avenue, Providence, RI 02906. Proceeds support The Chakrin Cable Family Youth Fund.]

Her wig was becoming. Her skin looked good from her restricted diet. I simply assumed she'd get better.

For our August meeting, we swung on two porch swings on Diane's deck. Laura read a poem about traveling with her son to look at colleges, while we closed our eyes against the late afternoon light. We were all so glad she was traveling again.

"Sitting with banana muffins and two typed stories, we took in the news."

Several months later, while lighting Chanukah candles with friends, Laura suddenly went incoherent, and a trip to the hospital revealed that the cancer had spread to her brain.

The meetings stopped. We sagged under the weight of the news. Our group members, as well as Laura's other close friends, were mobilized into staying with her at various times during the day so she wouldn't be alone. At first, it was almost luxurious to have several hours with nothing to do but hang out and talk with someone you really liked. But as the weeks went on, Laura was in more pain, and there was less and less talking. By February she was fitful both waking and in sleep.

When the call came that Laura had died, I quietly panicked about being asked to sit with her body. According to Jewish practice, corpses are never left alone. It turned out to be a first time for Ava and Diane, too. After the Yiddish song, we recited some prayers that seemed appropriate. We read excerpts from books on Jewish wisdom and Jewish mourning practice. We recited three of Laura's poems. We included her in our conversation because it was the last time she'd be present with our group.

The funeral director came in and gently inquired if we'd like to move somewhere warmer. We pulled up our collars and shook our heads. There was no question that this was the right place to be; the four of us together while it lasted. ■

Mara Sokolsky is an Alexander Technique teacher and freelance writer in Providence, RI. She writes Mid/Yid, *a bi-monthly column for the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent on midlife issues.*

After Growing Up in a Orthodox World:
Raising My Voice

BY ESTHER MIZRACHI MORITZ

AUSTIN

I STAND WITH MY BACK PRESSED against the cold glass of the sliding door, heart pounding, wishing to disappear. Uncle Ben towers above me, asking questions about school in his booming voice. I try to answer but it's no good. I can barely whisper.

"Is something wrong with you?" he asks. I press harder into the door, unable to take my eyes off of the bagel crumb on the floor next to his polished black loafer.

"What's wrong with her?" Ben bellows to my mother and father. "She won't talk to me. Come to think of it, I don't think I have ever heard Esther's voice." I feel queasy. My cheeks are hot. My mother tells Ben to leave me alone and, as they quarrel, I open the sliding door a crack and slip through it into the backyard, avoiding contact with the relatives for the rest of the afternoon.

On the way home, my mother continuously complains to my father, "She's shy. Why should she talk to him anyway?... Plenty of children are shy.... How dare he!" Nobody asks how I feel. I sit silently staring out the subway-train window. I swallow hard but the painful lump in my throat won't go away. At home, I go directly to the basement, sharpen my #2 pencil and take my diary out of hiding. My letters are wavy and uneven as I pour my feelings along with my tears onto its pink pages. Then, with a thin silver key, I lock the day's embarrassment in along with my dreams and fantasies, fictional stories and drawings, musings and random thoughts. I hold the book to my heart for a few seconds before returning it to its hiding place.

Fast-forward 30 years. I am an outspoken attorney and nobody believes that I am shy. I have a family and many friends. My colleagues marvel at my effortless ability

to write a convincing brief. Yet nobody knows about my other writings—the ones that continue to bubble up inside me and spill out into my journal and laptop.

I have just turned 40, my interest in legal work has faded, and my desire to write has become urgent. I have come to understand that my voice was silenced in the Orthodox, male-centered, Syrian-Jewish community where I grew up. It is only in my hidden writings that I feel safe to explore my true, authentic self.

I quit my legal job and sign up for Creative Writing I at the University of Texas, University Extension. There, I encounter a diverse group of 15 strangers who view my writing as "exotic." They question me about being Jewish, about being a mother, about being 40. They don't "get" me, and that gives me comfort. I feel safe because they are far removed from my "real life." The classroom becomes my grown-up basement; my classmates extensions of my pink diary. Several of us sign up for Creative Writing II and III, and then III again. Before I am ready to stop taking classes, I run out of classes to take.

I continue to write on my own and tell almost no one. When friends ask, "What do you do all day when the kids are at school?" I blush and quickly change the subject. When pushed, I apologetically confess to writing and feel as though I've revealed a shameful secret. Somehow Leila, an acquaintance, finds out and asks me to join a writing group. The women in the group are in my "real" life—they are my age and they have children. They are members of my temple.

My heart pounds. Part of me wants to disappear. "No," is what I intend to say to the invitation because the thought of her—or anyone—seeing my work is unbearable. Instead, I hear my voice responding loudly. "Thank you. I would love to."

As I drive to the first meeting, I feel like I am about to shed a mask that has kept me safely hidden my whole life. Having been raised in a culture where women did not have permission to express themselves, I am sure my writings are insignificant and insufficient, at best. In revealing those writings—and with them, the most intimate parts of myself—I wonder if I am about to expose something grotesque.

The first meeting is agony. The group discusses my work and I force a smile as I try to shake off the feeling that a band of strangers has entered my bedroom and is scrutinizing my naked body. The discomfort extends through many meetings, but I force myself to take notes dutifully on the group's feedback, and go home to rework my manuscripts. At some point, I come to understand—and actually believe—that the group is not judging me. They care about what my writing means to me. They want to help me dig deeper. They want me to share my truth.

As a group, we go through several incarnations; members come and go. Leila and I are together for the duration. In the end, four of us settle into a cozy sisterhood—Andrea, Kit, Leila and me. This incarnation feels right, like the cylinders of a lock clicking into place. It is warmer and more intimate than earlier combinations of people in the group. We never get right to work in a business-like fashion, but customarily hug hello and spend the first 20 minutes catching up.

We did not intend to be a homogeneous group—each of us believes in the value of diversity—but we are all in our mid 40s to early 50s. We each have two kids; they attend the same middle school and high school. Three of us are born Jewish and Kit is as good as Jewish—married to a Jewish man, living a Jewish life and raising Jewish children.

Our writing is diverse with the only common thread being Judaism. Andrea often writes about Jewish food and traditions—her family's experiences with pressing olive oil in Israel at Chanukah; her quest to find the perfect challah recipe for Shabbat. Kit is writing a young-adult novel about a girl in post-Holocaust Germany who finds a diary in her attic and learns that her house had been taken from a Jewish family during the war. Leila is working on a memoir about growing up with an emotionally detached father whose touchstone experience was liberating concentration camps. My fiction inevitably takes me back to my Orthodox upbringing in Brooklyn: an Orthodox woman secretly befriends a gentile, lesbian neighbor; an elderly woman rejoices in her freedom when her husband—a former stand-up comic in the borscht-belt—is near death.

We give loving attention to each of our works, one by one. First what we appreciate: Andrea's note that challah dough should feel like a baby's *pulke* when properly kneaded; Leila's poignant description of the elderly World War II veteran who broke down crying.

Pretty quickly, we turn to our questions and to pointing out inconsistencies: "Kit, Steffie seems older than seven, her conversations with her grandfather are too sophisticated." "Leila, do you have any childhood memories of warm, loving times with your father? You write only about his detachment." We welcome the difficult questions; we have unshakable respect for one another's intelligence and emotional insight. And we all have the same goal.

"Challah dough when properly kneaded," Andrea writes, "should feel like a baby's *pulke*."

At the beginning, I share only fiction with the group. Many of my characters are women not quite satisfied with their lives. They are searching—always searching—for meaning, for some unknown something. The group probes and prods for emotional details. "How does Reva feel when she discovers Lucy is lesbian?" "What does Emma really long for?"

"Well, um, I'm not sure," I often respond.

"Free-write on it," Leila advises over and over again.

So I free-write in my characters' voices and I discover that they are deeper and more alive than I imagined. I discover that their choices and their desires are their own, channeled through me but not

controlled by me. I begin to cherish my characters. They are wonderfully flawed and irresistible in their vulnerability. My writing sisters embrace my characters, too, loving and nurturing them with all of their imperfections. They do not judge Reva's dissatisfaction nor do they begrudge Emma her freedom after all the years.

And then, something amazing happens. My fiction goes on hold and I begin to write about my own life, my own emotions, my own search. I don't make a conscious decision to do this, but it is what pours out onto the page. I reveal deeply personal thoughts and feelings that, in the past, I would have hidden away between the covers of my journal. But here I am, willing—even eager—to explore my innermost emotions with my writing sisters. With their encouragement, I send my essays out, seeking publication—eager to open my heart to all. Something has shifted. I trust my readers. I trust myself.

Our group solidifies and becomes a unit. We begin to do more than "critique" each other's writing—we work together as a creative team, brainstorming ideas, coming up with connections that spill over between our writings. Like Leila's terrifying dream, vividly described in the middle of her memoir. She is peacefully swimming until she comes upon a lifeless, waterlogged woman sitting at the bottom of the lake. The woman reaches out a white wrinkled hand to grab her. Leila awakens, terrified, heart pounding. The dream comes often, haunting her and causing her sleepless nights.

I point out to Leila how significant the lake dream is to her story. "Early in your memoir you talk about learning to swim in a lake in upstate New York at summer camp," I say. "Then the lake lady comes in the middle. I think you need a water scene at the end, too." She looks at me, interested but puzzled. We are all silent—contemplating.

"The mikveh!" I say, finally. "Water as purification—that would be a perfect ending."

"Yes, yes," Leila nods, smiles and quickly scribbles some notes. "Burke went to the mikveh when he converted to Judaism. And then there is my swim in upstate New York last summer—right after I came home from Germany..." Her eyes are shining, her cheeks, flushed. Five, maybe six months later, I write an essay about my one experience at the mikveh, a purification that led me away from a life of lies. Leila reads it and calls me before our meeting. "Wow, you have a mikveh story, too!" she exclaims. "What are you talking about?" I don't remember until she reminds me that I helped her make a mikveh connection in her work. "It must have been sitting in your unconscious this whole time, Esther," she says, "just waiting."

Sometimes, as we sit together over warm mugs of tea, the group tells me that my voice is not loud enough—that my words are not coming through. They tell me lovingly, in compassionate tones that encourage me to try again. They wait patiently until I bring in another draft. But they are fierce, too. Their questions delve deep and refuse to let me go silent. In their support, they will not let me disappear.

And I do the same for each of them. Together, we come out of hiding. We speak. ■

Esther Mizrachi Moritz grew up in Brooklyn. She is at work on a novel about Reva, a strong Orthodox woman searching for her voice.

HOW ANOTHER GROUP WORKS

Sundays at the JCC: 12 Writers in a Room

BY MICHELLE BRAFMAN

WASHINGTON, D.C.

EVERY AUGUST FOR THE PAST SEVEN YEARS the Washington, D.C., Jewish Community Center sponsors a four-day writers' retreat. Anyone may attend, but typically only women do. Each day the group writes in a different genre: renowned author Faye Moskowitz teaches memoir, visual artist and poet Miriam Mörsel Nathan teaches poetry, and I teach fiction.

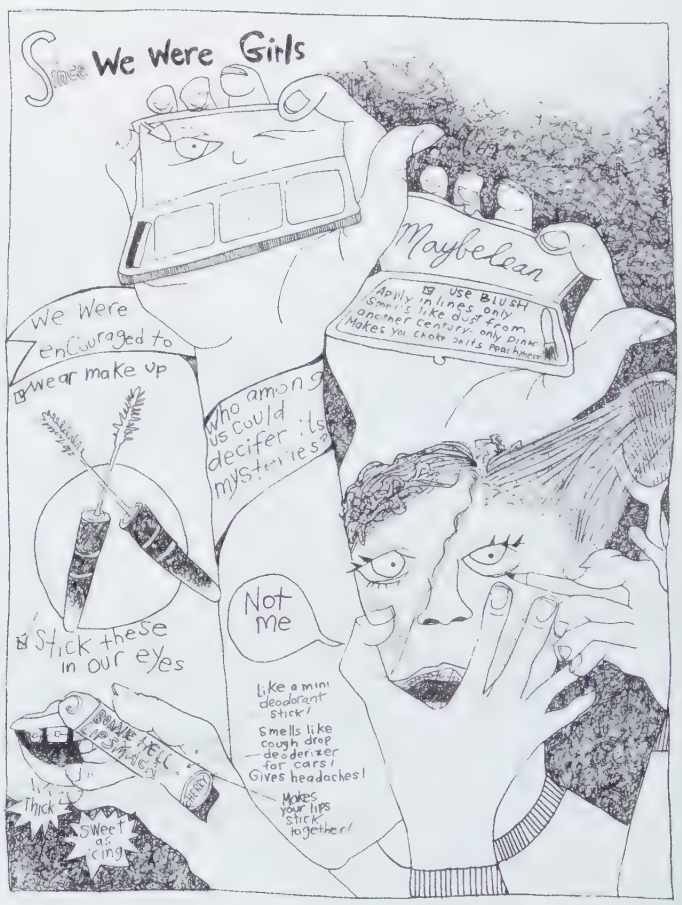
"Writing about our lives turns out to be no less Jewish an experience than a trip to Israel."

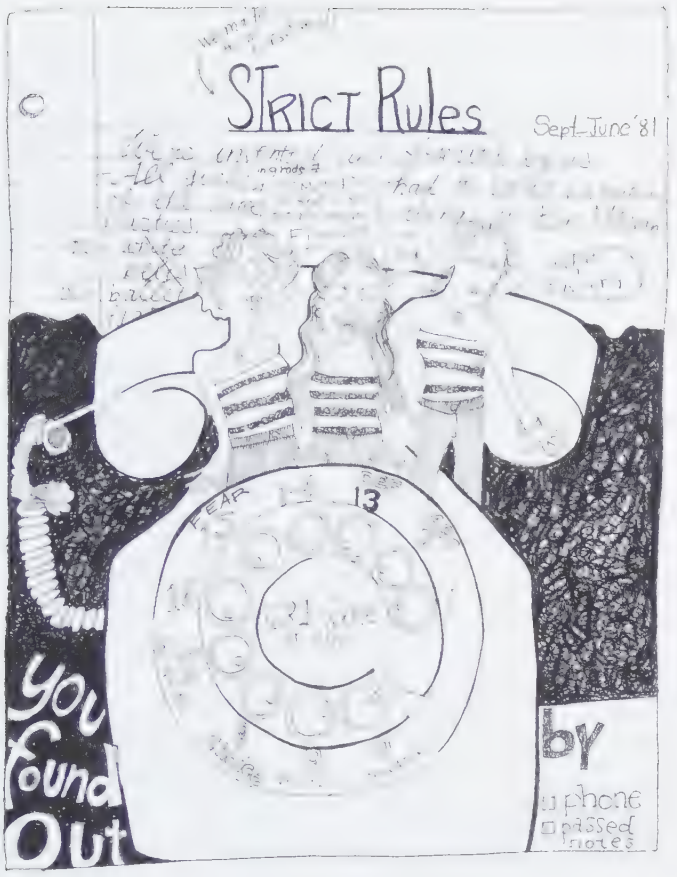
After attending the summer retreat, participants are eligible to join the ongoing writers' workshop that meets every six weeks at the JCC. In the workshop, participants are free to write in whatever genre they want. We meet in a small conference room off the main lobby, the backdrop the hum of a vibrant JCC on a Sunday afternoon. We've organized carpools for our kids, rearranged work schedules, and sometimes braved snowy roads to be together. We always have a minyan—usually a core group of eight and a revolving crew of four or so more. I'm the teacher, and my biggest challenge is squeezing, into two-and-a-half hours, enough discussion time *(continued on page 45)*

Love Letter
© Shira Spector 2008
I wake up this morning remembering
something
Before there was Ellen
and the L Word
criticize
before the GAY BOOM
BACK ♡ WHEN
we were invisible
when we weren't
Just LIKE Every ONE Else
!
Well before
PRIDE
was corporate $$
When two
Girls Kissing
was danger
that's
when you
found
me
Well BEfore
I found MYself
How did you Know
me
in the dark
?
do
Queers
emit Signals
like Bats ?
WHERE did you
get
your
COURAGE
my Love
?
I'd
ask
but
we
only
met
that
Once

it was like a sticky flower growing in a difficult place
but before
that
and
Once it was
13
Elliot Blooms Our Mitzvy
Mazel Tov
there was me almost every Saturday night in 1981
Birth

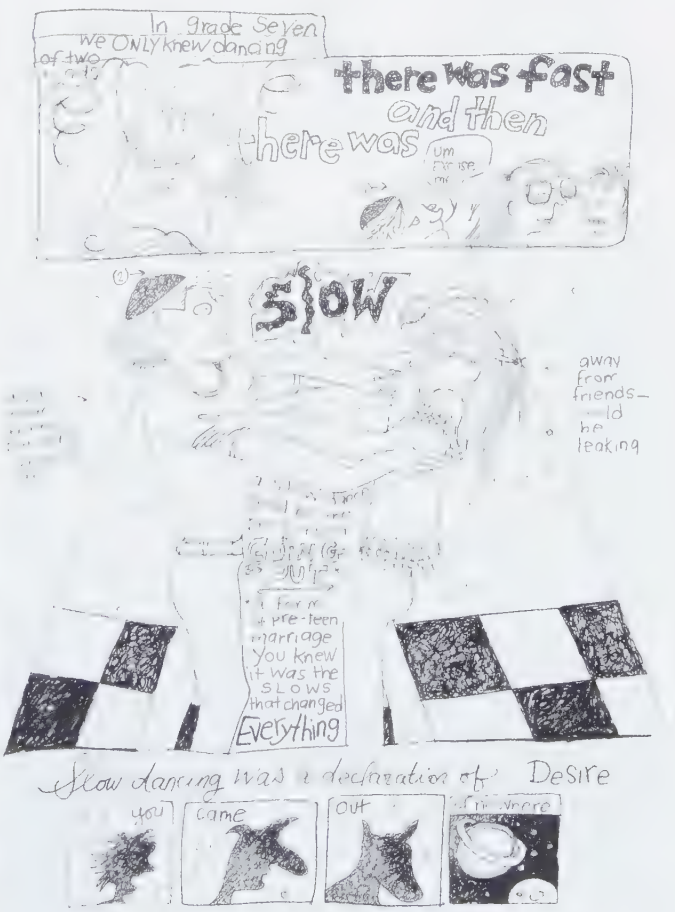
Being
Appearing Normal
was important


Since We Were Girls
We Were
Encouraged to
Wear make up
Maybelean
Who among us could decifer its mysteries?
Stick these in our eyes
Not me
Like a mini deodorant stick!
Smells like cough drop dedorizer for cars! Gives headaches!
Makes your lips stick together!
Thick
Sweet as icing


STRICT RULES
Sept-June '81
YEAR
13
21
You Found Out
by
phone
passed notes

Girls
Parties always started the same way
in Almost matching clothes relentlessly
checking out each others bums
Ensuring (if applicable) that no one's
LADIES WERE WRONG!!!
Try NOT to be obvious Please!!
can you see it?
how about now
what about like this?
me next time bulk!
majorly bulgier!
We were Lunch
OUR FEARS
We became eachothers mirrors, always on the lookout for Problems or Leakages
is there crud in my braces?
eyeliner leaking
the Dangers Were numerous
lipstick smudge
Just turned 13 was that fleeting moment when you could eat dessert
Without your heart breaking
Joy
Love
Small sweets
Fate
and their powers
FUN
Were for good and Could Never harm you
at least not until grade 8.

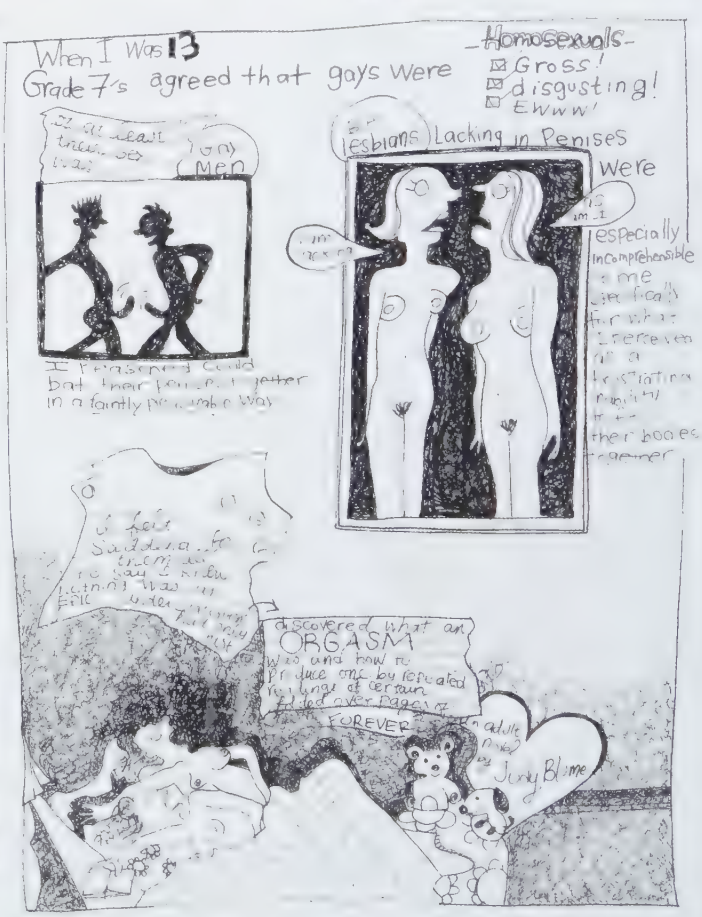
grade 8
OBy then we'd learned to HATE our bodies more each year !!!
and Later we'd develop Solutions to the problems caused by giving in to our Desires
APPROX FATNESS
173 calories = 30 minutes of RAPID JOYLESS DANCING
Eaten Fatness est. mated at
285 calories
Wahoo
45 minutes arm waving
Celebra
Good times
The answer!
c'mon is a celebration
CAN'T ZIP
the cause
the Consequence


In Grade Seven
we ONLY knew dancing
of two
there was fast
and then
there was
um Exercise
SLOW
away from friends—
old
be leaking
for
pre-teen
marriage
You knew
it was the
SLOWS
that changed
Everything
Slow dancing was a declaration of Desire
you
came
out
more

So there I was dancing fast trying to
And there you were
It was terribly UNCLEAR to me if you were a boy or a girl
I'd NEVER SEEN YOU BEFORE
I didn't know how to act
HORSE
male
female
By the time I'd determined that you were a girl
a slow song had started
It was too late!
You'd asked me
Wanna?
yes

you seemed so unaware of your
You were not supposed to
dance with other girls to slow dance
Heterosexuality
knows
all that glitters is gold
and I'm dancing at a bar mitzvah with a
Homosexual

SAFETY 1st
SAFETY 1st
SAFETY 1st
SAFETY 1st
SAFETY
I didn't think I knew any
Lesbians
DEPRESSION


When I Was 13
Grade 7's agreed that gays were
Homosexuals
Gross!
disgusting!
Ewww!
Only Men
Lesbians Lacking in Penises were
especially
I discovered what an ORGASM
FOREVER
Judy Blume

What's going on in there?!
Are you doing your homework??
NOTHING yes
Thanks to Judy this had become quite a habit. Once I broke a desk mirror watching myself.
MAGIC Powers
HOMOSEXUALS
they tranced you out
infecting you FOREVER With their
I had to get away!

I RAN.
I ran like a cowardly 13 year old with an undernourished sexual imagination.
I ran like Barbara Streisand in Yent, like the wind.
I ran like hell like my legs were on fire, and in the opposite direction of the rest of my life.
I'm so sorry.
bold,
that I left you
Brave
I was exactly that kind of girl - just not yet
So right
about me

Shira Spector is a visual artist, writer, co-mama, sex positive high femme dyke drama queen. *www.shiraspector.com.*

PARTISANAS

by INGRID STROBL

translated from the German by PAUL SHARKEY

German journalist and filmmaker Strobl uncovers the personal narratives of women who won quiet, small-scale victories against the viciousness of Nazis and their collaborators. Though their work has often been left out of official histories of the era, these were women who took their own instincts and impulses seriously, and acted on them.

In some French brothels, during the Nazi regime, prostitutes hid Jews and resistance fighters. The same women also served—it was their job—the officers of the occupying German troops. They risked their lives when they provided safe houses for the persecuted, and those whom they saved are still thankful today. Yet no one ever called this practical solidarity "resistance."

Over the course of years researching Jewish women in the resistance, I also fell under the influence of the popular hierarchization of resistance. At first, I had only been interested in women's participation in *armed* resistance until I conducted an interview with Yvonne Jospa. Under the aegis of the Jewish self-protection committee in Belgium, she had been responsible for the rescue of Jewish children and youth. I realized that the women who had organized and conducted the rescue of children and adolescents had probably provided the most important and, in any case, most effective form of resistance. Some of the women who had participated in the rescue of children even implicitly agreed with the historians, explaining, "But we didn't put up any resistance. We only took care of the children, and that was just natural. We simply couldn't allow them to be deported."

Jewish women were involved in all forms and formations of the resistance. They were activists in urban brigades, the ghetto underground, and partisan units. They printed and distributed the illegal press; they forged papers; they transported weapons and themselves participated in armed actions. They organized underground movements and ghetto uprisings; they were political cadres and—rarely—military commanders of armed groups. They found hiding places for Jewish children and youth, brought them to these hiding places, provided them with clothing, money and food, and with forged documents and encouragement over months and sometimes even years. They smuggled groups of these children and youth across the Swiss border and they accompanied illegal transports of boys and girls over the Pyrenees to Spain, and from there to Palestine.

Within the framework of the armed resistance, the task of liaison work and scouting was women's domain. Women were able to move more freely and inconspicuously. They were checked less often than men, and they even succeeded in actively using gender-specific patterns of behavior against the adversary. Thus, female couriers for the resistance occasionally got German officers to tuck their suitcases full of weapons in the luggage rack of the train or to carry them through a roundup at a train station. Other women used pregnancy or motherhood as camouflage, tying pistols around their stomachs and transporting illegal printed material in baby carriages. The women liaisons arranged illegal quarters, food, and clothing for the members of resistance groups. They maintained contact between groups and commanders, and among the individual group members. They scouted targets to be attacked and observed potential victims. They procured weapons and explosives and transported them to the location of the attack. Without them, the armed groups would not have been able to carry out their actions.

Like liaison work, the actions to save children were above all the responsibility of the women. It was mostly very young women, often social workers, nursery school teachers, members of the Jewish Scouts, or Zionist Youth movements. They took on, without any relevant experience, work that was both full of responsibility and dangerous, and which cost some of them their lives. They brought children and youth out of the country or hid them in cloisters, boarding schools, holiday colonies, sanatoriums, or with private individuals. They compiled coded lists so that they would be able to find the children again after the liberation. As far as possible under the circumstances, they took care not only of children's safety and their physical needs, but also of their psychological wellbeing. They transported letters back and forth between children and their parents; they thought up stories when letters from the deported parents no longer came. And they knew that, despite all of their efforts, they could not take away a child's loneliness, solitude, fears, and doubts.

Some of these women not only risked their lives, but also knowingly sacrificed them for their charges. Marianne Cohn was imprisoned along with children she had brought to the French-Swiss border only a few weeks prior to the liberation. The resistance offered to liberate her from the prison. She refused, although she had been horribly tortured. She did not want to risk the lives of the children. She assumed, probably correctly, that they would be killed in revenge for her flight. And she hoped that the Allies would liberate the prison before the children could be deported. This is what happened, although she herself was raped and beaten to death before they arrived.

Women who worked for social or educational institutions found social work or childcare transformed into resistance. And young women active in the Zionist Youth or the Jewish Scouts in Western Europe grew into their resistance work almost naturally without making, at least at the beginning, a conscious decision. Denise Lévy, one of the leaders of the Jewish Scouts, was informed one day that a round-up of her foreign charges was imminent, so she had to find hiding places for them. Those hidden could not, in turn, survive long without forged papers, so she therefore began to produce forged documents. One thing led to the other. When asked about her motives, Lévy said: "We could not allow the children to be detained. Being detained meant being deported. We didn't know at the time exactly what happened to those deported, but simply being deported was enough. We unconditionally wanted to prevent that."

Many of the former Jewish liaison women I interviewed emphasized that, for the success of their work, a combination of quick-wittedness and instinct was decisive. Sarah Goldberg, for instance, remembered when, "in the midst of panic," she did the right thing, although afterwards it remained incomprehensible, even to her, how she had come up with the idea to act. While she was conducting an assignment for her group of Jewish partisans in Brussels, she noticed that a known informer was coming towards her from the other end of the street. "Ahead of me were two Belgian policemen. I said to the two of them, 'Please keep going', and I pressed myself between them. They wanted to know what was going on and I said, 'Please simply keep moving'—as if they had arrested me. But they still wanted to know what was happening, so I said: 'Listen, I am a Jew and there in front of us is an informer'. The two of them then put me in between them and went with me in that way past the man. When the danger was past, one of them said he was going to take his lunch and the other said, 'Mademoiselle, if you need anything please come to me, I work in the commissariat of Foret.'"

These women remember "crazy" incidents, when they allowed themselves to listen to their emotions.

This story not only makes clear that segments of the Belgian police sympathized with the resistance, or, at least, were against the anti-Jewish politics of the Germans; it also shows that a disciplined, experienced, and canny illegal like Sarah Goldberg "functioned" in this case without having to deliberate. Where this ability came from is something she cannot explain. However, she and other women who have similar memories of reacting spontaneously and instinctively in seemingly hopeless situations guess that this behavior occurred more often with women than with

The feature film "Defiance," in wide distribution, dramatizes the true story of the Bielski brothers and their small band of Jewish men who fought the Nazis in forests and ghettos. Women, too, resisted the Nazis heroically—but often without naming themselves partisans or resistance fighters. One was Beate Berger (in white cap, with some of her charges), whose story is told in the independent Israeli film "The House on August Street," screened at the Washington Jewish Film Festival and elsewhere. Berger, a nurse, headed a boarding school for German Jewish children; her steely ingenuity spirited hundreds of them to safety in pre-State Israel.

men. And conduct like that described by Sarah Goldberg would probably not have worked for a man: The policemen would very likely have reacted negatively or aggressively to a similar request from a man. The intuitive behavior of the women presumably often corresponded to an unconscious protective instinct in the man, or to his desire to impress a pretty young woman.

The female Jewish couriers occasionally consciously employed these gender-specific ways of reacting in their work. In a book on the Jewish resistance in France, Anny Latour tells a typical story about the legendary boldness of Betty Knout, a 16-year-old courier for the Armée Juive (the Jewish Army). She was quite often in transit with two suitcases full of weapons. The railroad bridge over the Loire had been destroyed, so, in order to reach Paris, it was necessary to get off the train on one bank, cross another bridge on foot, and take a train on the opposite bank. A German officer saw how the petite young woman was hauling the two suitcases and offered to carry them for her. When he lifted them up, he was astounded by the enormous weight and asked Betty Knout what she had inside of them. Butter? Cheese? Ham? She smiled at him conspiratorially and said, "Psst! It's submachine guns." In response, the German officer burst out in resounding laughter and, amused, carried the entertaining young woman's two suitcases to the other bank of the Loire and onto the train waiting there.

The cockiness of this young woman, who gained her first experience with illegal activities in the resistance, is less astounding than the instinctual reactions of experienced communist militants like Sarah Goldberg and Yvonne Jospa. The latter also remembers "crazy" incidents that she cannot logically explain. Once, she learned there was an opportunity to house a larger group of Jewish children in a holiday colony. To do so, she had to take charge of the group at a specific time at the Gare du Luxemburg train station in Brussels. When she received this message, it was already too late to arrive on time. Jospa nonetheless got on the streetcar. She went forward to the driver and said, "Monsieur, I must be at the Gare du Luxemburg at such and such time." The driver accelerated and did not halt at any of the upcoming stops, so that she arrived punctually at the train station. "I don't know why I acted in such a way and I don't know why he reacted as he did," she said. "We both probably followed an instinct. He knew immediately that I was not a normal passenger who was simply in a hurry. And I knew, apparently subconsciously, that I could appeal to him. However, why this was so, I cannot say."

What is interesting about these experiences is less the fact that the women had control over what they called "instinct," than the fact that they allowed themselves to yield to this instinct. Such "illogical" and "emotional" behavior was at odds with the necessity, which they themselves also recognized, for revolutionary discipline and self-control. The fact that they allowed themselves to listen to their emotions, "instincts," and "intuition," also corresponds to other departures they made from the rules of conspiracy. They met with friends and comrades, although this was strictly forbidden; they took care of and visited their parents in hiding, although this also often contradicted the security rules; occasionally, they went secretly to the cinema; they even allowed, when it seemed right to them, orders from the leadership that they were supposed to relay, "to fall by the wayside." They practiced what one woman called "illegality in the illegality."

I think that it was precisely this occasional, situational "lack of discipline" that gave them an inner freedom; their occasional breaks with inflexible principles, even when they also shared them, enabled them, in the face of mass murder, to put up resistance against an inhuman adversary without themselves becoming inhuman. ■

Strobel is the author of Die Angst kam erst danach. Jüdische Frauen im Widerstand in Europa (The Fear Came Later: Jewish Women in the Resistance in Europe), *2005. This essay is adapted from* Partisanas: Women in the Armed Resistance to Fascism and German Occupation (1936-1945), *by Ingrid Strobl, AK Press, 2008. www.akpress.org Used with permission.*

NO, MARGARET SANGER WASN'T JEWISH

—but some of her best friends were!

by MELISSA R. KLAPPER

You probably know that since the 1960s, American Jewish women have been ardent advocates for reproductive rights, and have developed activist tactics and educational strategies to publicize, protect, and expand these rights. What we haven't really known until now is that there were precursors to this activism. Jewish women played critical roles in advocating for reproductive freedoms for more than a century—from the earliest days of the birth control movement in the United States—as consumers, distributors, and advocates of contraception. The goal of the early movement was to give women the power to control their fertility by educating them about their own bodies and sexuality and by dispensing diaphragms so that they would not have to rely on male techniques or devices for contraception.

The organized birth control movement is often dated to 1916, when Margaret Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in the United States. She chose a location in Brownsville, a Brooklyn neighborhood of Jewish and Italian immigrants, and advertised the clinic in Yiddish and Italian as well as English. Jewish mothers lined up for blocks, baby carriages in tow. Few of them wanted to have no children at all, but many were eager to learn how to limit the size of their families. At a time when federal laws made it illegal to distribute contraceptive information, and working-class women with spotty access to health care could only rarely get help from doctors, a neighborhood birth control clinic seemed like a godsend. But the police shut down the clinic in short order, arresting Sanger, her sister Ethel Byrne, who was a nurse, and Fania Mindel, a Jewish social worker.

Margaret Sanger was not Jewish, but her interest in birth control came out of her earlier experiences as a visiting nurse on the Lower East Side, where she watched many women die of self-induced abortions rather than bring more children into their families. As a socialist, Sanger also had connections with radicals such as Emma Goldman, who gave frequent speeches in Yiddish linking revolutionary class struggle and women's reproductive control. Goldman used her publication *Mother Earth* to press for birth control, handed out literature on contraception at her lectures, and gave demonstrations of contraceptive techniques, for which she went to jail. Like Goldman, Sanger too found many allies among American Jews. Her pamphlet *What Every Girl Should Know* was translated into Yiddish almost immediately, and all the American Jewish periodicals conducted a lively debate on the topic of birth control.

For the most part, the American Jewish community supported birth control use and activism. Several Yiddish plays promoted contraception, with titles such as *A Woman's Duty in Birth Control*. Progressive thinkers concluded that contraception was consonant with a fundamental morality of Judaism: the health and wellbeing of all Jews. After much debate and consideration of both *halakhic* and sociological issues, the Reform and Conservative movements passed resolutions during the late 1920s and early 1930s condoning contraception for health and economic reasons, while reminding the Jewish public of the sanctity of family in religious tradition. Unsurprisingly, a Jewish marriage manual distributed by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations insisted that "The Jewish religion does not permit direct birth control. Mechanical means to avoid contraception are allowed the woman only in cases where childbirth might endanger her life." It is important to note, however, that the high value Jewish law places on mothers' lives did allow for birth control in some cases, an exemption that Catholic law did not permit.

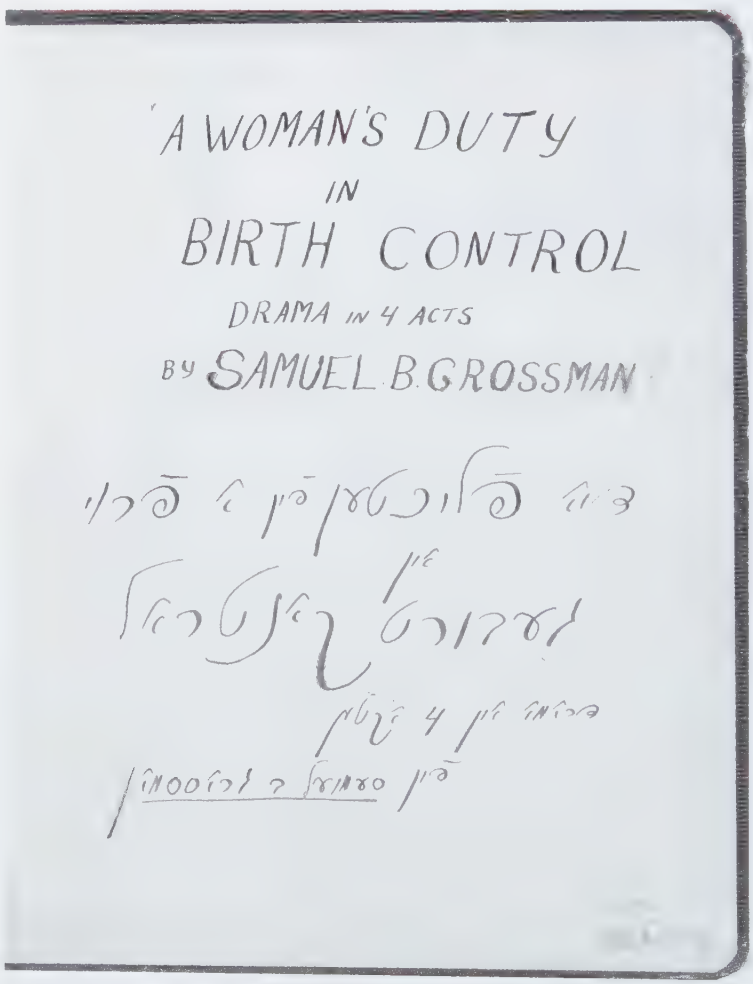
Three overlapping groups of Jewish women became involved in the birth control movement: doctors, married women, and activists. Nearly all birth control activists believed that trained professionals should distribute contraception through independent facilities free of the organized control of American medicine. At a time when anti-Semitism and sexism restricted Jewish women doctors' professional opportunities, they turned to birth control clinics as places where they could practice medicine, conduct research, and contribute to a cause they virtually all believed in. A roll-call of these birth control activists from the interwar era includes Drs. Sarah Marcus in Cleveland; Hannah Stone, Marie Warner, Cheri Appel, Anna Spiegelman, Naomi Yarmolinsky and Lena Levine in New York; Anna Samuelson in the Bronx; Evelyn Berg in Brooklyn; Elizabeth Kleinman and Lucile Lord-Heinstein in Boston; Bessie Moses in Baltimore; Nadine Kavinoky and Rachelle Seletz in San Francisco; Esther Cohen and Golda Nobel in Philadelphia; Hannah Seitzwick-Robbins in Trenton; Rachelle Yarros in Chicago, among dozens of others.

These Jewish women directed clinics, promoted sexual hygiene and often marriage counseling in their communities, advocated for relaxation of anti-birth control statutes in their states, wrote books about contraception, advised policy makers, and, most importantly, served as the human face of the birth control movement for many thousands of women. Dr. Cheri Appel, who worked at a clinic in New York, "felt that I was doing, making a contribution. It was a place where women could come and feel free to talk about sexual things, where they had no other place to go."

Jewish women doctors also served as primary figures in the legal battles that surrounded birth control work. Dr. Lucile Lord-Heinstein was arrested during a raid on a Massachusetts birth control clinic after an undercover female detective visited the clinic and was prescribed a diaphragm. Upon receiving a package of contraceptive materials from Japan, Dr. Hannah Mayer Stone became the central figure in a court case that ultimately yielded a 1936 Supreme Court ruling that it was legal to mail contraceptive items that would be used by physicians for legitimate medical purposes.

In some cities the proportion of Jewish clients matched the proportion of Jews in the general population, but in other cities it was considerably higher. A network of family, friends, and neighbors that had once supplied home remedies and well-meaning but ineffective contraceptive advice now provided unofficial referrals to birth control clinics. It was often difficult for working-class women living in decidedly unhygienic conditions to cope with the diaphragm, the most up-to-date contraceptives during the 1920s and 1930s, but the observably lower birth rates of Jewish women during these decades indicate the degree to which Jewish women of all class backgrounds limited

Contraception was consonant with a fundamental morality of Judaism.


A WOMAN'S DUTY
IN
BIRTH CONTROL
DRAMA IN 4 ACTS
BY SAMUEL B. GROSSMAN

Samuel Grossman's play was published in 1916, the same year that Sanger opened her clinic.

their families as best they could. A 1935 study showed that 45% of Jewish couples used birth control techniques immediately after marriage and 87% before a second pregnancy.

Many poor Jewish women thought of birth control as literally a matter of life and death, for themselves and for their families, especially during the difficult years of the Depression; these women bore witness to the damage uncontrolled childbearing could do. Testifying before Congress in 1934, Brooklyn mother Rose Halpern said, "Having had seven births in 11 years, I have suffered enough... I was left a physical wreck... I could safely say that Mrs. Sanger saved my life." One of her neighbors was not so lucky. The 28-year-old woman, pregnant for the fifth time in five years, had died even before giving birth.

Because disseminating birth control information and distributing contraceptive devices only gradually became legal, clinics were all privately funded and operated by networks of birth control activists. Both the American Birth Control League and the Voluntary Parenthood League knew that Jewish women could be depended upon to offer support across the country. Margaret Sanger's long-time Jewish secretary, Florence Rose, traveled across the United States during the 1930s, successfully calling on Jewish women to join her in supporting the cause. In 1928, for example, a group of Jewish women in Detroit raised money to open the Mothers Clinic for Family Regulation, at that time the only birth control clinic between New York and Chicago. Only 10 percent of the patients were Jewish, but the women still managed to secure the cooperation of the local Jewish Social Service Bureau and the Jewish Centers Association.

A number of Jewish women's organizations also became involved in birth control activism. The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), for instance, was one of the more radical women's groups of the interwar years, sponsoring birth control clinics in cities from St. Paul to New York. The national organization passed an official resolution in 1931 demanding the legalization of sending contraceptive materials through the mail. In 1938, NCJW appeared alongside the Young Women's Christian Association and General Federation of Women's Clubs on a list of national groups that lobbied for birth control bills. Shortly thereafter, a pro-birth control resolution was passed at the 1939 NCJW Triennial Convention, urging an end to any state statutes that continued to criminalize contraception.

Jewish women pointed to the psychological as well as the medical advantages of birth control. Dr. Rachelle Yarros, of Hull House in Chicago, wrote in 1924 that sexual abstinence was not conducive to adult well-being, according modern science, so the need for birth control was obvious. Jewish activists dismissed as foolish the Catholic Church's recommendation of continence or abstinence as a realistic possibility for married couples. Birth control would not just limit births but encourage them in an atmosphere of choice, control, and marital happiness unsullied by constant fear of pregnancy. The middle-class Jewish women who helped support birth control clinics for poor women understood the psychological benefits to harmonious family relationships. In 1936 the New York section of NCJW reported with satisfaction that its Mothers' Health Bureau provided birth control to many patients on relief and was of "utmost importance not only to their economic but to their marital happiness."

All Jewish women in the movement basically agreed with nurse Elizabeth Cohen Arnold's succinct statement that she was "trying to help people have babies when they could have them, afford to have them, and want to have them." ■

Melissa R. Klapper is Associate Professor of History at Rowan University and author of Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860-1920 *and* Small Strangers: The Experiences of Immigrant Children in the United States, 1880–1925.

THE PILL TURNS 50. ACT NOW.

The Pill celebrates its 50th birthday this year, and many kudos are due for the incredible opportunities it afforded women through effective contraception that needs no male participation. We who believe so strongly in women's reproductive rights laud those gains, while we've also become activists exploring the downside the Pill brings with it: the documented risks of stroke, breast cancer, blood clots, and (sadly ironic) decreased female sexual desire. As in the Margaret Sanger era, we renew our demands for safer options. And we need to launch piercingly honest discussions about sex among girls and women, boys and men that unite us in a surely universal goal of consensual sexuality buttressed by birth control that doesn't endanger female health.

How? What about a rousing revival of hell-raising feminist ethics embodied by plucky pioneers like Barbara Seaman? At the same time that she championed women's reproductive and sexual rights, she persisted in pointing out the Pill's health hazards. Her groundbreaking 1969 book, *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill*, ignited feminists who then disrupted 1970 Senate hearings with shouts of "Why is there no Pill for men?" (still a damn good question) and won first-ever mandates to place patient warnings on prescription drug packaging, inaugurated by Pill packet side-effect advisories. Seaman continued to speak out about hormone risks and demand better contraceptive solutions until her death in 2008.

The time is ripe to let rip on whole new levels of multigenerational feminist repro-activism. Let's tell the truth about contraceptives, with hormonal methods kept an accessible option but other less risky methods given equal priority. Let's be bold in our conversations with sons and daughters, mining the oversexualized media aimed at kids to spark soul-baring conversations about sex. Let's reflect together about how using methods that aren't "invisible" like the Pill give us more opportunities to be deliberate about our sexual choices and, hopefully, make wise ones. Let's have fun celebrating our escape from the bad old days of the Pill's infancy (one word: girdles) and delight in enacting a new "normal" that finally delivers on true sexual and reproductive freedom promised 50 years ago.

–*Helen Cordes*

two doctors/one friendship:

A MEMOIR FROM THE HOLOCAUST'S ASHES

by SALOMEA KAPE-JAY

"WHO'S THE GIRL IN THE RED DRESS?" I asked Hannah as we walked the dimly lit corridor of the pathology building. The year was 1947, my first year in medical school in Lodz, Poland. Covered with small abscesses, I was not in good physical shape. My doctor, however, stated that the multiple purulent craters were merely a "minor disease" and he treated them offhandedly with a hideously pungent, tar-like ointment, an ancient remedy which didn't help at all—though it did provide space around me in crowded places. There was little interest in his eye while he examined my ulcerous gums.

"Uh-oh! Scurvy!" he announced in an almost cheerful tone. "Eat fruit, child!"

Fruit! In the winter? In 1947?

The good doctor was irritated by my litany of non-life-threatening illnesses, and moved impatiently in the chair. X-rays showed a stomach ulcer.

"Drink milk, child. Next patient, please!"

Regardless, I was in better shape than Hannah, who had lost a good deal of hair, and whose shining scalp showed through thin remaining strands. How lucky I was to have survived the war! I should not have bothered the doctor with my furunculosis, shaky teeth, and pains in the belly.

I was too thin, and Hannah was too bloated. We carried the memories of the ghettoes, hiding places and death camps; we smiled only half-smiles… or else we were deadly, boringly, serious. Our faces inescapably expressed the hard-won motto of

our lives: "Don't be too happy. Every moment expect disaster." We were odd-looking specimens dressed in a hodgepodge of ill-fitting dresses handed down by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency.

BUT THE STUDENT IN RED... THE STUDENT IN RED WAS DIFFERENT. The golden tan of her unblemished skin matched the smiling, sky-blue eyes; the thick, straight-blond hair formed a golden casque around her head. Unlike the rest of us, her exquisite face was untouched by powder, lipstick or make-up. She smiled and listened attentively to a pathology assistant, and he, in turn, couldn't take his eyes off her.

"Who is she? What's her name? Is she an actress playing a medical student?" I asked the well-informed Hannah.

"No," she laughed, and then whispered, "That's Ola Kohn. She's the youngest student in the school, and so far she has the best grades. The hospital of internal diseases was named after her grandfather, Dr. Jacob Kohn. Her father was a well-known criminal lawyer; her beauty is from her mother." All these facts she delivered in a single breath.

"She's Jewish?" I said, shocked.

"Yes."

"Uchh!" I felt jealous. "She has the perfect genes to play a Polish-Catholic child! Where was she during the war?"

"On the Aryan side."

"Of course."

In the decrepit corridor of the medical building, Ola was pure sunshine. To Hannah and me, she seemed instantly to embody hope. She was the mythical phoenix risen from the ashes of war in the freshness of youth to live through a new cycle of being. I felt, in comparison, tormentingly inferior; I was still half ashes, half-wounded, a disabled bird unable to fly.

IN THE WEEKS AHEAD, MY INTEREST IN OLA BURNED STEADILY, and I finally worked up the nerve to approach her in the Polonia Cinema where we held some of our classes.

"Ola, I'm Sally," I introduced myself. "I missed inorganic chemistry yesterday and was wondering if I could borrow your notes."

"Sure," she said, full of cheer. She had a smile that beamed and then disappeared slowly, lingering in her eyes. "But my notes are very short," she warned. "Aren't you sick and tired of these lectures in movie houses?," she continued comfortably. "Yesterday we had physiology class in Symphony Hall and our professor with his long hair looked just like Toscanini, but mistakenly talking about thyroid disease. Well, at least the Hall is warm and bright. These movie houses are so damp and dark...and dirty and cold. Do you think the Polish government will ever build us real lecture halls?"

"First they must rebuild Warsaw," I said measuredly. "And then Gdansk. And then Wroclaw. And then Stetin. Our grandchildren will still attend chemistry classes at the Polonia!"

"You're an optimist," she said, tilting her head and beaming.

"Let's study together," I said impulsively. "I'm a speed-writer. I take excellent notes and I have a lot of textbooks." Textbooks were in short supply in post-War Poland. "I think we would be an excellent team." Something in me needed to attach to Ola; her presence buoyed my faltering hold on life. Beside her, maybe I, too, could survive beautifully.

"Fine, fine. Fantastic." She clasped her hands in delight, and I was struck by the sweetness and innocence of her 17 years. I was only three years her senior, but entrapped in grief and terror and oldness. I could never smile the way that Ola did.

SOON WE WERE INSEPARABLE. I took reams of notes, while Ola wrote only a few sentences; her ability to memorize lectures—almost in their entirety—took my breath away.

"Ola," I said one day with unmasked envy, "Was the gift of 'oral memory' passed on to you in your paternal chromosomes?"

"Oh no," she said. "It's an acquired skill that I mastered long ago. I learned to listen intensively." She smiled beatifically.

At some point between our second and third years of medical school, my furunculosis unabated, Ola ordered me to stop applying the antediluvian ointment. In an extremely generous gesture, she bought me a new drug on the black market; it was called penicillin. It was expensive, and I knew that, in order to pay for it, she had worked many extra nights in the emergency room. Injecting it over and over into my glutei was excruciating—each time like driving a red-hot nail into muscle. I often wished I had been left alone with the painless furuncles, but when they finally vanished, leaving silvery, star-like scars, I said to Ola, "I can never pay you back, but all the stars on my body belong to you."

"What a good omen for my practice!" she laughed. "Getting paid in stars instead of money!"

Opposite page: Dr. Ola Kohn (married name Alexandria Ronen) in 1976 in Israel. Left: Dr. Salomea Kerszenberg's I.D. from Lodz Medical Academy, issued in 1952 when she was a medical resident.

At the back of my neck I had one particularly awful scar, and Ola removed a necklace she was wearing and put it on me. "Look," she said, "this conceals your scar perfectly."

Day by day, month after month, I was showered with Ola's smiles and largesse, and I could feel my accumulated bitterness and anguish melting. Slowly I was being transformed into a phoenix, too—just a mini-phoenix, but capable, nonetheless, of a bit of rising.

OLA GRADUATED FROM MEDICAL SCHOOL SUMMA CUM LAUDE; I, without any laude whatsoever. We both chose the Queen of medical science—internal medicine—as our specialty. In 1957, both Ola and I decided to leave Poland, disgusted finally with its politics. Our paths diverged, hers leading her to Israel, and mine to America.

"You'll write letters to me?" I asked moronically. Ola was not a "written word" person—she never took notes; she *remembered*. I was losing my best friend, as was she.

But even in parting, she smiled.

I wrote letters. "Ola, the word 'the' is an unpronounceable nightmare! My lips, tongue and vocal cords refuse to make this bloody sound. Kindly Americans insist that I have a 'charming accent,' but I see them tilting an ear trying to make sense of the cacophony that issues from my mouth." In another I wrote, "Don't condemn me, Ola! I have abandoned the Queen of medicine for anesthesia."

Shortly, Ola could afford long-distance calls, and my phone rang every couple of weeks.

"Sally?... ally?... ally?... ally?" the early connections from Israel were terrible, full of echoes and static. "Don't cry over your accent. I had to start from scratch with a brand-new alphabet! As for the kingdom of internal medicine, it is divided into many provinces. I now specialize in the 'pump.'" She had become a cardiologist. "I love you from the bottom of my 'pump!'"

"Ola," my mother implored me, "you have some chance to survive. Smile, smile. You must look always livelier and merrier."

Over the years, the phone connections improved and Ola's voice aged, becoming gravelly and raspy. In times of peace, I felt guilty—I wrote many letters to Ola, but only in my head. When there were wars in Israel, my husband's eyebrows rose at our skyrocketing phone bills.

And then, in the mid-'70s, I got a wonderful call. "Ignaz and I are coming to New York for a year," Ola said. "He has taken a sabbatical."

"Great. Great," I said. I had waited so long for a visit!

I MAPPED OUT A TOUR OF NEW YORK, wanting Ola to see my adopted city in all its glory. In a state of elation, I met her at the airport, even though she and her husband were being met by an embassy escort. Her face did not seem affected by time; its beautiful features were unchanged. But she wore dark glasses, and they felt like a heavy curtain between us.

"I have an allergy to dust, Sally, and the glasses protect my eyes," Ola said upon arriving. "I slept so poorly on the plane. Do you happen to have a sleeping pill on you?"

"No. Since when did you start smoking?"

"Everyone smokes in Israel," Ola said. "We're all living in a war zone. Do you have any Valium?"

"No."

"I'll call you soon," she promised, whisked off by Ignaz's entourage. Through the next week I phoned her morning, noon and night, but she didn't answer—nor return my phone calls. In the morning she was asleep, reported Ignaz, in the afternoon napping, at night she was too tired to talk. Finally I reached her.

"Cholera!" I said, using the curse that was our slang in Poland. "You owe me an explanation, Ola. Did I do something wrong?"

We arranged to meet at an obscure luncheonette on the Upper East Side. I disliked the place as soon as I pushed open the filthy door, but I ordered a cup of coffee, focused only on Ola.

"WHAT'S WRONG?" I SAID, WITHOUT PAUSING FOR SMALL TALK. "You must tell me, Ola!"

"Nothing's wrong. It's not you, Sally, it's...," she said haltingly, starting and stopping. "I'm not... I'm fine. I'm an insomniac, Sally. We are coping, Ignaz and I. I can't stop...I think incessantly... all I can think about is the past. Why did you and I never speak about the war?"

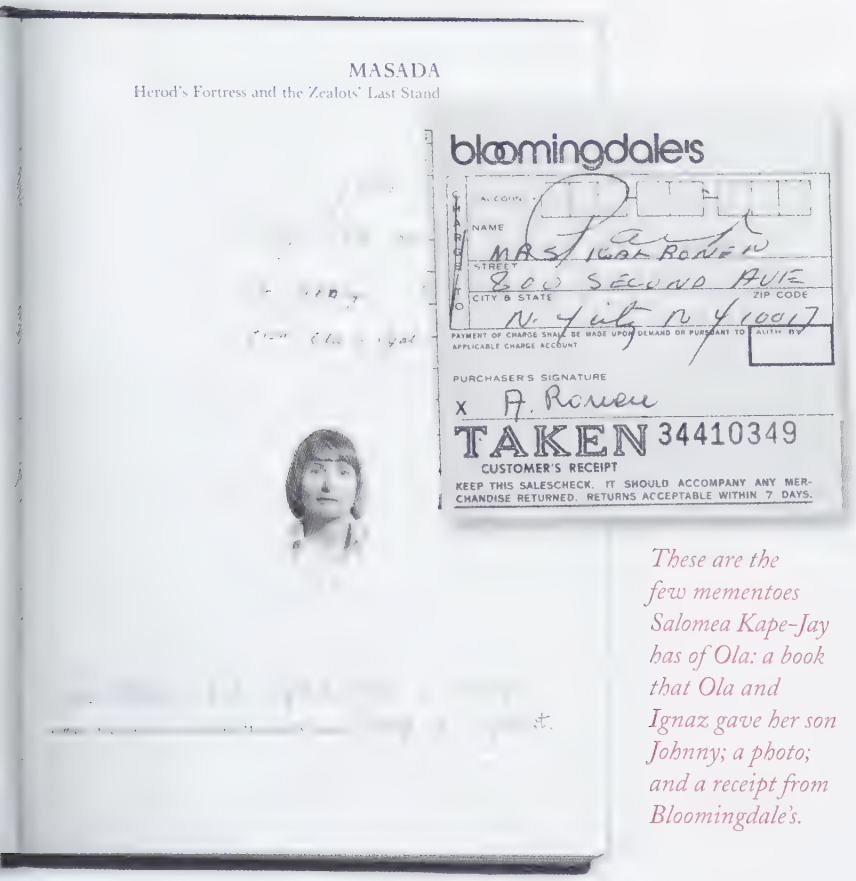
"How could we have?" I cried. "You were so whole, a glorious phoenix. You transitioned so smoothly after the war, while I was broken and ravaged. It was not...."

"'Smoothly!'" she said sharply. "None of us survived the war 'smoothly.' I was on the Aryan side, in a little village near Warsaw. Our lives on the Aryan side hinged on the color of our hair, the shape of our noses, the intonation of our voices, on a thousand, thousand little factors...of which the most important was luck."

She was spilling, telling a story that, despite our lifelong intimacy, she had never shared.

"I was the 'lucky' 11-year-old blonde girl with blue eyes and a snub nose," she said. "I blended well among the Poles. My aunt and uncle weren't so 'lucky,' since they had the kind of pale skin that turns brown with the first rays of the sun, and their hair and eyes were black. They were hidden by the Poles in the attic, a windowless cubby hole with a camouflaged entrance. Their one-year-old daughter was separated from her high-risk parents and adopted by a childless Polish family. My blonde and beautiful and fearless mother was the mastermind of this elaborate survival plan, and every Sunday she brought money to the Poles for our upkeep.

"I was supposed to be a war orphan, and I called her Mrs. Rolsky. Every night I visited my aunt and uncle in the attic, and they gave me lessons in math, history, Latin and physics. We



These are the few mementoes Salomea Kape-Jay has of Ola: a book that Ola and Ignaz gave her son Johnny; a photo; and a receipt from Bloomingdale's.

didn't have pencils or paper; I did my homework in my head while I worked in the fields, milked the cows or cleaned the house. For three years they continued their oral teaching and slowly they replaced my parents.

"Mrs. Rolsky slowly faded away as my mother. A few months before the liberation, the Gestapo came straight to the attic and shot my uncle and my aunt in the courtyard. I saw the execution from the window and crawled under the bed. The Polish woman told my mother when she came for her usual Sunday visit, 'Take the girl with you. NOW! She is crying and tormented and she looks like a haunted Jewish child. I can't help you anymore. The Gestapo took my husband.'

"My mother wiped the tears from my eyes and said imploringly, 'Ola, you have some chance to survive. The end of the war is near. Smile, smile. You must look always livelier and merrier. Your eyes must give away nothing about yourself. I promise that we'll cry together after the war, and we'll take the baby home.'"

"After the war," Ola continued, "my mother left the baby with the adoptive parents, for she believed that the little girl would be better off not knowing of her Jewish origins and her parents' fate. I smiled, Sally. I smiled and smiled. I kept smiling till I couldn't smile anymore."

Two rivulets of tears coursed steadily down her cheeks, and I instinctively removed her dark glasses to pat dry her eyes. I saw that the whites of the eyes were crisscrossed by a fine net of tortuous red vessels; the irises had a glazed blue color; the pupils.... I recognized the familiar pinpointed pupils of the overdosed addicts in the emergency room into whose collapsed lungs I pumped liters of oxygen.

A glassy-eyed Ola looked back at me. A junkie! My phoenix was a junkie! I felt intensely betrayed. Ola was for me the future of us. I needed her to represent an intact state. I felt seething rage.

"I have to go home," I said, and I ran from the restaurant.

TWO DAYS LATER I GOT A PHONE CALL AT THE HOSPITAL. "Sally," Ola said, "I wanted to tell you...I have to tell you that...."

I stopped her mid-sentence. "I can't talk," I said, ice in my voice. "I'm on call." All I could think was, 'Junkie. Junkie. You're a junkie, Ola. You're a junkie, Ola.'"

"I'll call you some other time," she whispered, hanging up.

Three days later, an anonymous message was left on my phone. "Ola committed suicide. Ignaz wanted you to know. It was Valium and alcohol...at a hotel on the Upper East Side. There is no funeral. She donated her body to medical research." I was on call in the emergency room, and I was in denial. I worked feverishly all night, but in the morning could recall none of the cases. I rushed to see Ignaz.

"I failed her," I said. "I failed her, Ignaz," I said over and over. I could hardly squeeze the words through my constricted throat. "I didn't let her talk. I was being...I was so damn rigid. I was focused only on me, consumed by rage, by her betrayal, by how I needed her to carry on. I could have saved her, Ignaz, if I had let her talk. But I was only thinking, 'junkie, junkie.' I spat out the words to myself. I could have saved her. I could have saved her."

I repeated myself for hours, reliving the click of the phone after Ola's whisper, the silence hanging on the wire—as I hear it to this day.

"Sally, no one could save Ola," Ignaz said, a deadly tiredness in his entire being. "She was hospitalized and treated, hospitalized and treated. Over and over. She was depressed, she warded it off with Demerol and Valium. With Nembutal. Death was for her a better solution, Sally, more desired than existence. She left a letter for you."

THE LETTER WAS SIMPLE AND TO THE POINT. "It took me years to find my cousin," Ola wrote, "my uncle and aunt's daughter. But I was too much of a wreck to write her. Give her my ring, and ask her to forgive me. Here is her address."

The ring was lost during the police investigation, but I wrote letter after letter. They each came back stamped "Addressee Unknown." ■

Salomea Kape-Jay, born in Lodz, Poland in 1926, spent five years in its ghetto during the Nazi occupation, and was one of 800 Jews left by the Nazis to clean the ghetto after its liquidation. Emigrating to New York in 1966, Kape-Jay had a long career as an anesthesiologist. Her collected memoirs, translated into Polish, will be published in Lodz this year, on the 65th anniversary of the ghetto's liquidation.

bathing

A short story by ALICE SHECHTER

Grandma was short and compact as a fire hydrant, with gray wavy hair swept straight back from her face, held with tortoise-shell combs. Her eyelids drooped as if weighted, and her eyes looked out from deep pouches. But they were kind eyes, mild and patient. Her cheeks were crosshatched with wrinkles. The pores on her nose were large; from each side of her nose to the bottom of her chin ran a furrow, like a seam that stitched a pillowy jowl into the soft flesh of her face. Her neck spilled onto her bosom, which sat on her chest like a shelf. She walked with her elbows close to her body. Her short legs were the same width ankle-to-knee, and her square chunky shoes tilted her slightly forward. With her arms tucked at her sides and her high bosom out front, she looked like a proud, dignified little hen. Her name was Anna.

I grew up visiting Grandma every Sunday with my family. Nothing was expected of me but to say hello, and eat whatever was put before me, and play with my sister and brother in the other room while the adults talked. Later, when I was a teenager, my parents sometimes left Grandma to look after us if they went away for a weekend. I would come from school and Grandma would be on the couch, sitting with her hands crossed serenely in her lap, waiting to be asked for something I might need. But there was nothing I needed that Grandma could provide; I barely ate, my clothes were studiously unironed, my room could have used tidying but I was in the middle of a hard fight to allow no one in there but myself. So Grandma sat patiently, with not much to do. She read Yiddish but not English, and watched only one TV program—the *Evening News with Jim Jensen*. With my own head filled with a constant and urgent low roar of politics, morality, general outrage and romantic possibilities, I could not think of even one word to say to Grandma. She might have been a piece of furniture.

Once I had my son Jeremy, things changed. When my friends were busy and the long day of hours with a baby grew too tedious, we went visit Grandma. She would take Jeremy from my arms and bunk her forehead to his, reciting a Yiddish rhyme that made them both laugh; "More again!" he would demand, and she would happily start over. She would feed us lunch at the oilcloth-covered kitchen table: sour cream and sliced bananas, egg cookies she baked herself and kept especially for me and Jeremy in a jar on top of the fridge. We would visit with the row of women in beach chairs in front of the apartment building, who exclaimed loudly over Jeremy's genius as he obligingly blew kisses and waved bye-byes, while Grandma visibly expanded with pride. Then I would drive Grandma to Waldbaum's supermarket, and let her take her time as she picked over the vegetables and fruits, and clucked her disapproval at the rising prices and diminishing quality of every single item.

Grandma was 86 when they moved her out of her apartment. She couldn't walk the stairs; my mother and aunt were afraid of gas burners and faucets left running, spoiling food, falls in the bathtub. She eventually got used to the old age home—the "senior residence"—though she missed her pots and pans and houseplants, her sewing box and her neighbors of thirty years. At first she complained: there were too many old people in the home; no salt was allowed for the flavorless food. But the complaints faded as she became good friends with her roommate, Mrs. Reitman. They told stories and sang old Yiddish songs. They went to meals together, put each other to bed and woke each other up. Mrs. Reitman was losing her memory, but they never spoke of it. Grandma made sure to steer Mrs. Reitman by her elbow when they walked together; and buttoned her into her sweater so she would not leave it behind. And no matter how many times a day they saw one another, even if only a minute had passed, Grandma would say, "Hello, Mrs. Reitman, it's your roommate, Anna Gallant," to spare her the embarrassment of not knowing who she was.

"Can you walk unaided? Feed yourself? Dress yourself?" Grandma was fine until the last question: "Can you bathe yourself?"

Grandma held her own until Mrs. Reitman died. No new roommate came. My mother and aunt were once again worried; the residence was for self-reliant people only, as determined by affirmative responses to some very specific questions: "Can you walk unaided? Feed yourself? Dress yourself?" Grandma was fine till the last question: "Can you bathe yourself?" Grandma could no longer get in and out of the bathtub, and her room had no shower stall. Her daughters decided that Grandma could get by with sponge baths at the sink; and she tried. Grandma had battled dirt all her life. Through many hard times and years of poverty she had chased cockroaches, scraped potatoes, laundered clothing, scrubbed floors, washed windows. Being clean mattered to her. But there wasn't much she could do with just a washcloth. Her hair grew dull. The odor of urine hung about her, along with the smell of the stale talcum powder meant to

neutralize it. When she stiffened, embarrassed, as I leaned to kiss her cheek, I made a decision.

"Grandma. Let's give you a bath."

I'm pretty sure the last person to see Grandma naked before that day was Grandpa, who died in 1949. Or it may be that *no* one had *ever* seen her naked. But there in the small bathroom, Grandma slowly pulled the combs from her hair. With her back to me she unbuttoned her blouse. I helped her slide the polyester pants down over her hips. She sat on the closed toilet seat as I untied her square black shoes and rolled down her elastic stockings. As she stood in her yellowed cotton brassiere and nylon bloomers, I ran the water and let the tub fill. She handed me a plastic jar of bath beads that must have been a decade old. I was doubtful, but when I dropped a lavender ball into the bathwater a layer of bubbles began boiling to the surface. Again Grandma turned her back to me. I unhooked her brassiere and she slipped it from her shoulders, covering her breasts with crossed arms.

It occurred to me that no one had really touched Grandma in years and years and years; no more than a quick hug hello, a peck on the cheek good-bye.

At her bloomers, I almost gave up. I could not think of a way to tug down the raggedy elastic waistband of those underpants without trampling on a lifetime of propriety and deference. Front or back, any way she turned, Grandma would be utterly exposed.

Grandma faced me. She leaned heavily on my shoulder with her left hand; with her right she pulled at one side and then the other of the waistband, until the panties were at her knees. With her hand still on my shoulder, I knelt and pulled them all the way down, then steadied her as she stepped out of them. I stood and looked at my grandmother Anna. All the parts of her body that had been exposed to weather, wind and sun—the face I had known all my life, the arms, legs, chest, hands and feet—were browned and wrinkled, marked with rough patches and dozens of age spots. But from her breasts to her bottom, her skin was milky white and smooth as marble.

Grandma grabbed the bar at the side of the tub, and together we lowered her into the steaming, fragrant water. Her eyes were closed; for a minute she just sat, rippling the water with her fingertips. Then I soaped a washcloth and scrubbed her back; she soaped her arms and breasts and plunged the washcloth under the layer of bubbles, letting out a sly chuckle as she washed her "privates." I lathered the back of her neck; shampooed her hair, rinsed and shampooed it again. As I massaged her scalp she let out little sighs of pleasure, in rhythm with the motion of my fingers. It occurred to me that no one had really touched Grandma in years and years and years; no more than a quick hug hello, a peck on the cheek good-bye.

For nine months or so I bathed Grandma every other week. I grew less tentative; we developed a routine, and I brought her a bathrobe, and special soaps and lotions. But, there came a time when Grandma could *not* dress or feed herself, and had to move again. I still visited her, but there was less and less of her in the person I went to see. The harried aides had no time to take her to the bathroom; she was kept in diapers. She ate on their schedule and sat in her wheelchair till someone could bring her back to her room. Many times I would enter the day room on a visit and her face would brighten.

"Ruthie!" she would happily cry out; and I would sidestep my hurt that she mistook me for her long dead niece, and be glad that at least Ruthie's visit had cheered her up.

One day I sat with Grandma as she nodded in the lounge. Her gray hair was frizzled and unkempt; her chin rested on her chest. "Grandma," I said, more to myself than to her, "Grandma, remember when I used to give you a bath?"

She stirred and lifted her head, and I saw that she recognized me. She gripped the armrests of her wheelchair and pulled herself up till she was sitting almost erect. She looked straight at me. "You gave *me* a bath?" she said, indignant. Placing a finger in the center of my chest, she poked me once, hard. "I gave *you* a bath." ■

Alice Shechter was the director of Camp Kinderland for 25 years, and now works part time in their New York office. She lives in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

A LITTLE WOMAN MADE THE WORLD

by DAHLIA RAVIKOVITCH
translated from the Hebrew by CHANA BLOCH & CHANA KRONFELD

A little woman made the world
Her bed,
That great round globe.
And it didn't escape the world
That a little woman
Lay resting on him.
And he grew grasses into her lap,
Wrapped her body
With leaves of grass.
Carried her off
As he carries mountains and valleys,
Lands and seas.
And this very woman would whisper:
O world—O bed of mine,
O world—rivers and streams,
Raging seas and even me.
Here I am, afloat like a sailor's daughter
And the world is my boat.
A swarm of stars like a swarm of bees
Humming around the globe.
The world cleaves to my belly,
My hands sprout up like flowers from the earth.
And atop that enormous globe,
Delight courses into my limbs.

A little woman made the world
Her bed
—That great round globe.
And it didn't escape the world
That a little woman
Lay resting upon him.

Dahlia Ravikovitch (1936-2005), one of the great Hebrew poets, was widely honored for her artistry and admired for her courage as a peace activist. In addition to winning the Israel Prize, her poems have been translated into 21 languages.

Chana Bloch's most recent books of poems are Mrs. Dumpty *(U. of Wisconsin Press, 1998, winner of the Felix Pollak Prize) and the forthcoming* Blood Honey Itals *(Autumn House Press, 2010).*

Chana Kronfeld, Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley, is the author of On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics *(U. of California Press, 1996), winner of the MLA Scaglione Prize for Best Book in Comparative Literary Studies.*

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REVIEWS

Apocalyptic Adventures

Hilarity and heartbreak at the end of the world.

If a superplague were released that would wipe out humanity, how would you spend your last days? ***Last Last Chance*** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $25), the debut novel from **Fiona Maazel**, takes us through a world of wealthy druggies, dysfunctional families, and estranged lovers as they struggle with a world on the brink of catastrophe. With rollicking prose both searing and poignant, Maazel's dystopian vision enchants and agitates, chaperoned by a 30-year-old addict ready to be with her one true love.

When Lucy Clark gets word that her biologist father's virulent strain of virus has been stolen, she has just left after a day of work (at a kosher slaughterhouse, where she plucks chickens) to head to her estranged best friend's wedding. Accompanied by a middle-aged paramour, she finds herself back in her wealthy, drug-addled family's New York home, where she struggles to get clean and reconnect with her sister and long-lost boyfriend. What follows is a sometimes meandering, always entertaining journey as Lucy and her mother do their time at an isolated desert detox facility, commandeering the enclave's siege when the plague strikes. The novel's final section shows an increasingly apocalyptic city where, holed up in the family apartment, Lucy manages to reconcile with her loved ones and learn the secret of her beloved grandmother's one passionate romance.

While this book's theme of love in the face of adversity may seem maudlin or trite, *Last Last Chance* is anything but. Lucy's narrative voice is cynical, cranky, and self-critical but also easygoing—she is difficult to like, but easy to empathize with. As she describes herself after meeting her ex-lover: "I checked myself the way you might post-car crash: are you hurt, where and how bad? But it was nothing major, just the nicks and dents your body sustains daily." Lucy can epitomize this generation's feminist heroine: self-possessed and self-destructive, as free to ruin or reclaim her life as earlier generations of aimless male heroes have done. The darkness that surrounds her can sometimes be overwhelming, even when written with a comic touch, and I found myself occasionally put off by the enormity of her depression and drug use. Despite this caveat, I couldn't get enough of Maazel's hilarious plotting: the scenes of siege in the remote detox center had me in stitches, with its motley crew of restless drug addicts warring with the refugee natives escaping the plague.

Last Last Chance is an heir to Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, with its narrative digressions and apocalyptic preoccupations. At the heart of both novels is the question of reincarnation: are souls meant for each other? Can one find one's true soulmate? Maazel taps the fount of ultimate longing and desire when she chronicles Lucy's heartbreak and parallels it with the story of her grandmother Agneth's lost love. The world may be ending, the narrator may be cynical, but the memories of love that Lucy carries will sustain her into the uncertain future. Should the apocalypse come someday, we can only hope to be as lucky as Maazel's Lucy.

SARA N.S. MEIROWITZ

Out of Egypt

When fleeing means forgetting.

Joyce Zonana, author of ***Dream Homes: From Cairo to Katrina, an Exile's Journey*** (Feminist Press, $15.95), was 18 months old when she emigrated with her Egyptian-Jewish parents from Cairo to Brooklyn. She remembers nothing of her country of birth, and her parents—all but forced into exile amid a rising tide of anti-Semitism in 1950s Egypt—seem to have willed themselves to forget what they'd left behind. "I have no memory," Zonana's mother says when asked about her life in Egypt, where an estimated 80,000 mostly Sephardic Jews lived in the middle of the 20th century. So it is with little help from her parents that Zonana embarks on a journey to piece together her family history, and to understand her own persistent feelings of dislocation.

In this absorbing, wide-ranging memoir, Zonana describes Jewish life in Egypt in the first half of the 20th century. At that time, many Jews did not embrace the nation's dominant Arab-Muslim culture. They preferred to send their children to

schools where they were steeped in French language, history, geography, and culture.

The author succeeds in weaving together stories of her parents' youth with that of her own. She vividly details her proper Brooklyn childhood, complete with the plaintive wails of the Arabic music that her grandmother cherishes, and the pungent flavor of fresh-ground cumin that laces her mother's tabbouleh salad. She goes on to detail an equally spicy journey of sexual discovery that includes intimate relationships with women and men, and the academic pursuits that take her outside of her comfort zone—specifically to Norman, Okla., where she accepts a professorship; there, she feels acutely her foreign roots and, at times, senses that she is only "playacting at being American."

Zonana takes her readers along on her climactic mid-life trip to Egypt. She tours historic synagogues, meets with the leaders of Cairo's now-tiny Jewish community, and discovers an "ancient home of dreams"—her visit to which inspires her elderly parents to open up, if only a little, about their motherland. While in Egypt, the author also assays the Islamic Ramadan fast "to atone for [my parents'] withdrawal from the culture within which they lived."

The final chapter of *Dream Homes*, as the book's subtitle suggests, is focused on an "exile" of another sort. In 1990, Zonana had moved to Louisiana to teach at the University of New Orleans, but she is forced to flee her adopted hometown as Hurricane Katrina approaches; and she decides to move from the city permanently in the storm's devastating aftermath. It is Zonana's heart-wrenching decision to leave behind the life she had spent the past 15 years creating that enables her, at long last, to understand why her mother "never wanted to return to Cairo, did her best to forget it."

GABRIELLE BIRKNER

Her decision to leave New Orleans enabled her to understand why her mother refused to return to Cairo.

Recipes for Success

A buffet of short stories from Lara Vapnyar.

Conventional wisdom dictates that you should never shop for groceries while hungry. I would further advise that you not pick up a copy of ***Broccoli and Other Tales of Food and Love*** (Pantheon, $20) by **Lara Vapnyar** on an empty stomach—it is impossible not to crave a steaming bowl of borscht after dipping into Vapnyar's latest literary offering. Conveniently, then, this collection of six short stories is followed by an appendix of as many recipes.

The story that gives rise to the collection's title, "A Bunch of Broccoli on the Third Shelf," tells of Nina, a young woman who, like Vapnyar herself, emigrated to the United States from Russia. For Nina, the sight of a floret of broccoli conjures up another world—part imaginary and part nostalgic. She pores obsessively over cookbooks, but never manages to cook the produce she buys each week from the local Korean markets. The vegetables expire in the refrigerator drawer, their decay a shriveled and malodorous testament to her unrealized desires.

Throughout the stories, food carries a variety of meanings—a sensual indulgence, a means of fashioning identity, a cultural touchstone or a portal into another world, be it the vegetable gardens of Nina's childhood or the exotic prize of American puffed rice in Katya's Soviet girlhood ("Puffed Rice and Meatballs"). Vapnyar's descriptions, simple and deft, are so ripe you can practically taste them, and while the specific flavors are distinctively Russian American, her writing has a universal appeal.

Homecoming, recognition and connection criss-cross unnervingly accurate depictions of loneliness and alienation. The stories are as much about the complexity of nostalgia (for a lost homeland, for lost desire, and for lost youth) as they are about love. In "Slicing Sautéed Spinach," after a disappointing return to the Prague she had pined for after coming to America, Ružena tells her lover "I went back to New York, hoping my homesickness would return—you know, we always wish for something that we can't have. But it didn't. I went home every night and slumped in my chair with nothing to long for."

Vapnyar wields a kind of understated humor and draws her characters—with their vulnerabilities, idiosyncrasies and foibles—with tender strokes. Later, Ružena tells that lover a lie. Vapnyar writes: "It was easier than she'd imagined. Her heart pounded, but that didn't worry her. The heart wasn't anything that people could see."

Vapnyar is also the author of the critically acclaimed collection *There Are Jews In My House* (2004) and of a novel, *Memoirs of a Muse* (2006). For old fans and for those who have not yet sampled what Vapnyar has to offer, *Broccoli and Other Tales of Food and Love* is a delectable read and a fine, if brief, cookbook. Try the borscht—it's delicious.

SPENCER MEROLLA

Optimism, Months Ago

Despite current bad news for Jews, reasons for hope.

Hope, Not Fear: A Path to Jewish Renaissance (St. Martin's, $24.95) by **Edgar M. Bronfman** and **Beth Zasloff** appeared a few months ago, when the world looked rosier. In those halcyon days, pre-Madoff, pre-market meltdown, philanthropist Bronfman, and Zasloff, an alumna of the Bronfman Youth Fellowships, set forth the areas of Jewish life where our energies should go, where funding should be directed, and where worrying should stop. Think positive!

Much of the energy in this book is the presence—and the personal narrative—of Bronfman himself, turning 80 this year. In the many roles he has played as a funder and an organizer of Jewish institutions, Hillel among them, Bronfman has learned about Jewish issues and Judaism from women and men of all backgrounds. He seems perpetually curious, a devotee of lifelong learning,

and wants Jewish life to reflect the richness of both the tradition and its newer cultural manifestations. He disapproves of those who would fence Jews off, and believes Jewish life needs to be more inviting and enticing, both for outreach and "inreach."

Bronfman pitches for a Jewish renaissance, but in truth this "rebirth" has been going on for a few decades already. The "new ideas, new conditions, and new models" he calls for and praises have already shaped the trajectories of many of the people who appear here. One of the pleasures of this book is hearing the voices of the many women who have shaped Bronfman's thinking. Rabbi Janet Marder creates a blessing for a non-Jewish spouse, Tova Hartman wants to take traditional women's roles "to center stage of a shul's life," Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum reflects that when her synagogue, New York's Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, the largest gay and lesbian congregation, was founded in 1973, "you had to look straight even if you weren't straight."

Bronfman (for it is clearly his voice propelling the book) zooms in close at the end, to focus on what happens right under our own roofs, not just in schools and synagogues and summer camps, and delivers a charge that parents recognize home as "the mooring" for Jewish identity and experience.

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

Ripped from the Headlines

You'll recognize the lefty parents, the ideologue daughter, the wounds.

The Believers, by **Zoë Heller** (HarperCollins, $25.95), is a slashing satire of New York's liberal elite.

Literary mavens tell you the old-fashioned novel is dead? Don't believe it. If you love a sprawling good read with characters you come to know intimately and dilemmas you can understand, you will love this book. At once incisive and sometimes hilarious, Heller's prose quickly assures you that you are in capable hands.

Zoë Heller is a celebrated writer in the U.K., but she hasn't much name recognition, yet, here in the U.S. Her best-selling second novel, *What Was She Thinking? Notes on a Scandal,* was adapted into the Oscar-nominated film *Notes on a Scandal*, with Judy Dench and Cate Blanchett. *That* Zoë Heller.

In *The Believers*, Heller maps new territory for herself; she weaves a tragicomic account of the unraveling and eventual patchingtogether of a family on the verge of total disintegration. The family patriarch Joel Litvinoff, a famed Leftist radical lawyer whose biography will seem immediately familiar to anyone who has been reading newspapers for the past three decades, lies in a stroke-induced coma as his wife, Audrey, their adopted son, Lenny, and their two daughters, Rosa and Karla, examine the negative space in their lives caused by his absence.

Against an authentic backdrop of post-9/11 New York City, Joel's wife and children find their long-held beliefs—philosophical, psychological, and political—called into question by the secret at the center of the story.

In a family notorious for its anti-religious sentiments—Joel sends back bar and bat mitzvah invitations with the words "There is no God" scrawled across them—daughter Rosa, an ex-Marxist, finds comfort in exploring Orthodox Judaism, much to her mother's chagrin. Karla, constantly dieting and crippled by her parents' belief in her mediocrity, discovers an intriguing way (spoiler note: it involves a Muslim newsstand operator) to resist her controlling husband's efforts to shape her life.

But the book's true epiphany is left to Audrey, a foul-mouthed Queen of Mean, one of the most outrageous and unforgettable characters in recent fiction. Heller shapes Audrey with a sharp palette-knife. She is a mother who belittles her daughters and enables her drug-using adopted son. An outspoken anti-feminist, Audrey nevertheless scorns traditional female roles. So resistant to nurturing is she that in one memorable scene, her son-in-law recalls "... a recent dinner at which Audrey had upended a can of spaghetti and meatballs onto a serving plate and carved the congealed cylinder into slices."

In a family notorious for anti-religious sentiments, Joel sends back bar and bat mitzvah invitations with "There is no God" scrawled across them.

Just when you think Audrey has no redeeming qualities at all, Heller deftly turns the tables, and Audrey's insight is the reader's as well. She has convinced herself of all she gave up to be the wife of Joel Litvinoff, hero of the Left. When Joel dies she comes to understand that she has lived her life with "... self-flattering delusions, face-saving fantasies." What use she makes of those insights provides an intriguing and credible conclusion to a memorable book. Interestingly, it is not their radical beliefs that Heller skewers in *The Believers,* but the final revelation that these people never truly practiced those beliefs at all.

FAYE MOSKOWITZ

Slum-Lord Survivor

The messy truths of post-war English Jews.

These days, real estate is all. Just prior to reading the fourth novel by journalist and novelist **Linda Grant**, ***The Clothes on Their Backs*** (Virago, £11.99), I watched a British TV documentary about West London's property market, referencing the area's notorious 1960s slums, run by the infamous slum-lord, Peter Rachman—a Jew. I cringed, and wondered how British Jewry, a particularly self-conscious community, responds to this scandal.

Rachman inspired Grant's book, a fictionalized account of his life (as Sander Kovaks) relayed through his niece,

Vivien, who transcribes her uncle's 1940s Hungarian war-time reminiscences. With quiet English middle-class suffering, the characters battle their isolation from others and the world. "Everything felt too near, yet eerily distant at the same time. The outside world looked as if it was seen through the thick glass window of a speeding train…"

But in Vivien's case, the suffering had real roots, and London's anonymity served a purpose. As Vivien learns as she comes of age in the 1970s, before they arrived in England the Kovakses survived the Holocaust. While experiencing her own first profound losses—virginity, a husband, an unborn child—Vivien learns about her family's loss, and acts out her knowledge through continually evolving clothing styles. In an attempt to escape her parents' stifling depressions and lives centered on television quiz shows, she seeks out wild outfits and her estranged playboy uncle, and begins to transcribe his traumatic life-story.

Grant's novel explores the complex family dynamics of Holocaust survivors and their legacies, giving voice to those English Jews who've kept silent about their identity. Grant explores how siblings—Sandor, and Vivien's father—each survived the Holocaust in different ways: Sander wheeled-and-dealed, while Vivien's father cautiously left Hungary prior to German occupation, but mainly to avoid a personal embarrassment. The brothers' contrasting personalities affected how they survived and their subsequent responses to the war and to England, while developing disdain for one another.

By creating a psychological tale which asks large questions about race relations, belonging, self-defense and civic duty, Grant cleverly invokes moral themes without being didactic. As Vivien learns, Sandor was an ostentatious slum-lord who was also helpful to black immigrants and to his mother, while her father was a quiet, hard-working man who denied truths and rejected family. Grant's characters are ambivalent, self-contradicting, and messy. Through their varying reactions to Nazism, the 1970s English right-wing emergence, and the current terrorism crisis, Grant reminds us that these philosophies and their victims are—like slum-lording and profit-making—complex. Similarly, Vivien loses, or at least questions, some of her bleeding-heart liberal values, resulting in a view of the world that is unresolved, in a way that is not fashionable in today's British media. Indeed, one of Grant's characters invokes a critique of journalism and its superficial moral judgments; and Grant (herself a journalist) bravely reminds us how stories are often reported in a simplified and one-dimensional way, and shouldn't be.

While the novel has farfetched coincidences and hanging strands (Vivien's relationships with her husbands and mother), *The Clothes on their Backs* is a touching look at the political through the personal.

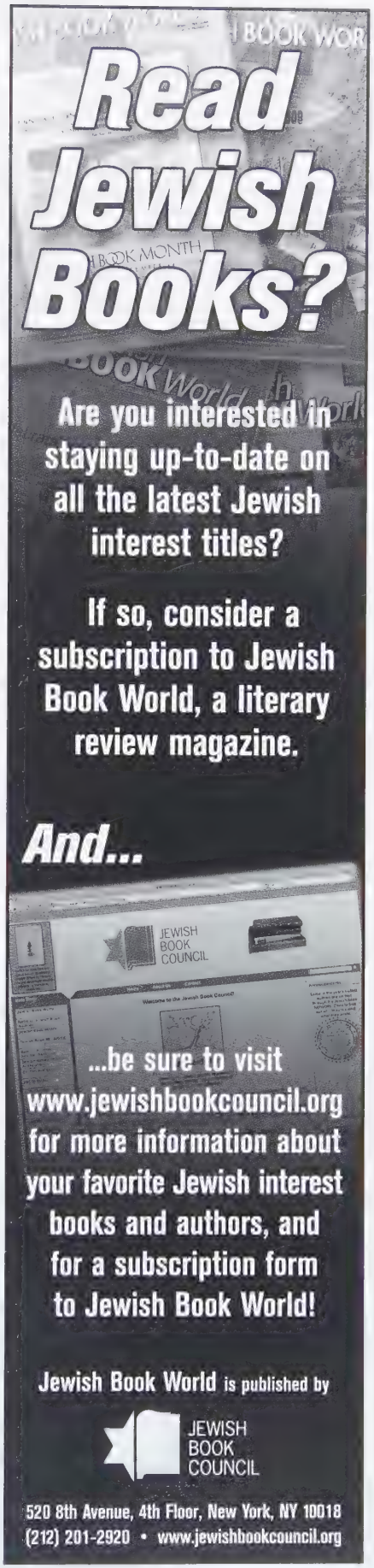
JUDY BATALION

Is Breast Best?

No easy decisions when it come to feeding baby.

These days, it seems every mother—regardless of whether she breastfed a child—has strong feelings on the subject of breastfeeding. ***Unbuttoned: Women Open up About the Pleasure, Pains and Politics of Breastfeeding*** (Harvard Common Press, $14) is an anthology of essays that sets out to capture those emotions. The editors, **Dana Sullivan** and **Maureen Connolly**, enlisted 25 accomplished writers to share deeply personal, often poignant, accounts of the varied experiences they had while feeding their babies. Most of the contributors, though not all, breastfed their children.

The book begins with descriptions about the first latch-ons and end with weaning stories. Many mothers will undoubtedly find echoes of their own journeys on one page or another. But the subtitle of the book seems to promise a more complete picture than the one presented here. The essays are peppered with a litany of complaints: sore nipples, lost libido, useless lactation consultants, sleep deprivation and halted careers, to name a few. So many of these writers seem motivated, at least in part, by "breast is best" guilt; they do not speak of finding true joy in choosing to nurture their babies this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way. Almost completely absent are voices of women who find breastfeeding to be a transformative experience, empowering and guiding them though the early days of motherhood. That's unfortunate given that the book is being marketed as a great gift for expectant and new moms.

Though most of the writers at least allude to some positive aspects of breastfeeding, a mother-to-be may not see past the negative comments that seem to crop up in so many entries. Novelist Julia Glass recalls a friend's comment on breastfeeding, "Oh God, I hated every minute…I decided three months would be enough. I counted the days." Suzanne Schlosberg describes how boring she became as she spent countless hours nursing her twins. "I don't really think of myself as a mother," she writes. "I think of myself as a breastfeeder." Pamela Kruger asserts that "many scientists vigorously dispute" that there are health benefits to breastfeeding. She quotes an August 2007 article in a health journal stating that pro-breastfeeding research is inconsistent and flawed. That's a pretty strong statement of "fact" to print unchallenged in a book that's being promoted as great baby shower gift.

One entry captures the challenges of working while breastfeeding. Nancy M. Williams describes her decision to trade her position as a powerful executive for a slower-paced job that's more compatible with breastfeeding. A few months later, she is unexpectedly handed a tantalizing new position, but after struggling for a few days to maintain her pumping schedule and get home in time to nurse her daughter, she reluctantly passes up the opportunity. "As much as returning to my insignificant, diminished work self pained me, the possibility of Gracie's weaning hurt more," she concludes.

Ironically, some of the most thought-provoking material comes from the mothers who did not nurse. These women describe a constant barrage of "breast is best" reports from friends, family and media, that often leaves them feeling like inferior mothers, embarrassed to bottle-feed their babies in public. Years later, some still feel the need to justify their decisions. Their stories are a reminder of how quickly—and sometimes unfairly—we judge ourselves and each other as mothers.

Still, some mothers who did breastfeed may wish the writers had penned a few more meaningful insights, such as Heidi Raykeil's beautiful description of a moment when the baby latches on and is totally at peace: "It is the surprise of direct connection, ultimate intimacy, the trust and ability to go back, if even for a 15-minute feeding, to a time when two separate beings were one."

Non-nursing mothers say "breast-is-best" reports leave them feeling like inadequate mothers.

HEIDI GRALLA

Flowing Narratives

Menstruation essays show how far we've come.

The first lines of a few of the stories in ***my little red book*** (Twelve, $14.99), edited by **Rachel Kauder Nalebuff**, give some indication as to the subject of this collection:

"I was ten at the time, and it was summertime."

"I was thirteen years, tall and lanky."

"I was eleven years old and the first of all my friends to get a period."

Voices rise up—and blend together—in this collection of first-period stories. It's hard to remember which of those lines introduces the story of a girl in Ghana in the 1970s, and which the story of a girl heading to her softball game in the 1990s. A few of the recollections stand out, but most fit easily into a few categories of emotion: surprised-and-shameful, or impatient-and-proud.

The impetus for this project was Nalebuff's own first period, while waterskiing, and the responses of the women in her family. Nalebuff started collecting these stories when she was only 13, and her writing could have used a more expert editor. Nine of the stories mention Judy Blume; and though a number of the contributors are professional writers, the stories do not have unique voices. At the center of the collection is an essay by Gloria Steinem originally published in Ms. 1978. The brief essay, "If Men Could Menstruate" imagines how glorified the period would be if it were a masculine event. That this 1978 piece is the focal essay in a 2009 book says, perhaps, a lot about menstruation in today's world. When the period was connected to shame and embarrassment, we needed feminists like Gloria Steinem to reclaim it for us. But now instead of belts and "the curse," we have Tampax Pearl. Looking at the stories that describe first periods from the last decade or so, you can see just how much things have changed.

Jennifer, who got her period in 1998, practiced using tampons and pads in anticipation of the event; when it did arrive, she "was on cloud nine." Zoë, the editor's sister, IM's the information to a friend in 2005. Jacquelyn muses on the difference between her period in 1967 ("I spent the day cowering in a dark bedroom") and her daughter's in 2008 ("When she came to me one winter night to report her first period, we spent an hour cuddling in my bed").

So do we need this book? Maybe. The graphic honesty of some of the stories is especially helpful. After reading this book, no girl will expect bright red blood and wonder about that brown stain described in this collection as a "muddy smudge" and a "rust-colored crust." And not every daughter has a parent who will prepare and explain. Hopefully *my little red book* will help make itself even more obsolete, so that it can exist primarily as a record of the way things were.

EMILY SEIFE

Firsts, and the Future

A wide-angle look at the Judaism we won.

New Jewish Feminism: Probing the Past, Forging the Future (Jewish Lights, $24.99), edited by Rabbi **Elyse Goldstein**,

is a sweeping exploration of feminism's impact on contemporary Jewish life.

The book is divided into seven sections—Theology, Ritual and Torah, Synagogue, Israel, Gender, Sexuality and Age, Women and the Denominations, and Leadership and Social Justice. The 41 contributors represent different generations of Jewish feminists, from women in their early 30s who grew up with the fruits of Jewish feminism, to some of the pioneer "matriarchs" of the movement. All explore the impact feminism has had on varying aspects of Jewish life.

There's even a lone article by a male rabbi: "Where Are the Jewish Men? The Absence of Men from Liberal Synagogue Life." I braced myself before reading this, half expecting another diatribe about how Jewish feminism has driven men from the synagogue (the argument being that women's participation has "feminized" the synagogue, making it unappealing to men). Yet in his balanced piece, Rabbi Joseph Meszler argues that men aren't in *shul* because they're spending their free time with their families, caring for their children, shouldering domestic responsibilities, and being equal participants in their family lives rather than retreating to the synagogue.

New Jewish Feminism includes an eight-page bibliography of Jewish feminist books and music—most published in the last decade and a half. While the book is very comprehensive, I would love to know more how Rabbi Goldstein and her husband raised three feminist sons, how feminist rabbis balance synagogue roles and family life, and how other Jewish feminist leaders balance their professional and activist commitments with caregiving. I would also have liked a chapter assessing the impact of feminism on academic Jewish studies, where scholarship in Jewish gender/feminist studies is flourishing. But there's plenty here.

The Red Tent author Anita Diamant, in her introduction, triumphantly describes feminism's impact on Judaism: "We won. Which is to say, the Jewish people have been blessed with a new, vital chapter in our history." Literature scholar Wendy Zierler echoes this sense of achievement's in her discussion of the plethora of women's/feminist Torah commentaries, when she states confidently, "It is clear, at this point, that Jewish women now own the Torah."

SUSAN SAPIRO

Always Independent

The re-emergence of a Zionist feminist foremother.

Marie Syrkin: Values Beyond the Self (Brandeis, $35), a biography by **Carole S. Kessner**, reveals a remarkable woman.

Marie Syrkin, a leading Jewish public intellectual, was born in Switzerland in 1899. She became a gifted journalist, witty poet, influential American Zionist, and a beautiful, strong-minded woman admired by intellectuals and political leaders. Her mother, Bassya, had studied medicine and been involved in Russian revolutionary activities. Her father, Nachman Syrkin, the theorist behind socialist Zionism, was well known in Zionist circles. Learned, charismatic, exuberant, he was also impractical, barely earning a living. The family traveled from country to country before settling in America, in a poor section of the Bronx, when Marie was nine.

MY FUTURE IS IN AMERICA
Edited by Cohen and Soyer
Let Me Continue to Speak the Truth
HUC PRESS
MARIE SYRKIN
New Jewish FEMINISM
Probing the Past, Forging the Future

By then she knew Russian, German, French, Yiddish and—soon—English.

Nachman Syrkin, whom Marie adored, dominated her life, particularly after her mother's death. When, at 18, she eloped with the writer Maurice Samuel, her father had the marriage annulled, and her second husband, a chemist named Aaron Bodansky, whom she divorced, could not live up to the excitement of her family home. From Nachman, Marie gained a passion for Zionism. Around 1932 she met and became fast friends with Golda Meir, whose biography she later wrote (*Golda Meir: Israel's Leader*, 1969). The following year she traveled to Palestine for the first of many times, and after her return helped launch the Labor Zionist journal, New Frontier. She was already contributing poems and Zionist articles to Menorah Journal and other Jewish intellectual publications, and continued doing so throughout her life. When the Nazis came to power in Germany, she was among the first to call for large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine in defiance of British quotas there.

Interestingly for a woman of her generation, Syrkin always considered herself a feminist. Her life was testimony to these words she once spoke to Kessner: "You don't have to tell me that a woman has to be independent, I was always independent, and very energetically so." Syrkin arranged a joint custody agreement with her second husband for their son, David, unique in its time; she spent long periods apart from her third husband, the poet Charles Reznikoff, when she traveled or lived on the east coast while he was on the west, but the marriage lasted; and through all her marriages she kept her own family name. In 1950 she became the first female professor of an academic subject at Brandeis.

Carole Kessner had been Syrkin's student at Brandeis University, and remained a lifelong friend. With this biography she makes an enormous contribution to women's history and Jewish letters by reintroducing us to this extraordinary personality, prominent in her lifetime but mostly forgotten today. Drawing on extensive interviews with Syrkin and intimate letters from family and friends, and setting her narrative against the background of the times, Kessner lets the reader understand the real drama of her subject's life .

Early in this book, Kessner relates that Bassya Syrkin, ill with tuberculosis, told the 16-year-old Marie, "You are just the kind of daughter I dreamt of having." They were the last words Marie heard from her mother, who died two days later. Had Bassya lived, she would have seen her dreams come true many times over.

FRANCINE KLAGSBRUN

Anti-trafficking activist

Denouncing the stereotype of Jews as pimps.

A new scholarly biography, ***Let Me Continue to Speak the Truth: Bertha Pappenheim as Author and Activist*** (HUC Press, $34.95) by **Elizabeth Loentz**, takes the reader on an erudite journey to the world inhabited by German Jewish women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The multi-talented Bertha Pappenheim (1859-1936) was a social worker, author, playwright, poet, and activist on behalf of women's rights.

Pappenheim was "Anna O"—the patient who invented Freud's "talking cure."

Her legacy includes a tuition-free school for Jewish girls that taught thousands of young women seamstress skills, and the JFB (German League of Jewish Women), which performed charity work with the sick, the elderly, and pregnant unwed girls. Perhaps her most important area of activism was her research and advocacy against the white slave trade (of prostitution and sexual slavery), which was apparently thriving amongst the Jews of Eastern Europe.

Amidst these endeavors, Pappenheim also translated major texts from Yiddish into German, including *The Memoirs of Gluckl of Hameln* and *Tsenerene: Women's Bible*. Discussing these translations, Loentz analyzes their intellectual contradictions. For example, Pappenheim showed some disdain for the Yiddish language, sensing that it was not a language of culture (*kultursprache*). Yet she nonetheless promoted Yiddish literature through her translations. Another conflict Loentz examines is Pappenheim's denunciation of the Jewish pimps enslaving young Jewish girls (when she was speaking to Jewish audiences), but fighting against the stereotype of Jew-as-pimp when speaking at secular anti-trafficking conferences

And then there is another, fascinating angle to this woman's story. In a 1953 biography of Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones revealed that the famous patient "Anna O," the creator of the "talking cure" which catapulted Sigmund Freud on his great psychoanalytic adventure, was none other than activist and author Bertha Pappenheim. Interestingly, Pappenheim did not discuss her own psychiatric illness or treatment in her public speeches or her writing. According to Loentz, Pappenheim was a firm opponent of the practice of psychoanalysis, and wrote, "Psychoanalysis is, in the hands of a doctor, like confession in the hands of a Catholic priest—whether it is a valuable tool or a double-edged word depends on who is using it and for what." As a psychologist, I was disappointed that the book does not touch upon the psychological aspects of her productive life (her childhood and family life are not even recounted). But perhaps that's as Pappenhaeim would have wished. Certainly this biography offers an unusual chance to encounter issues that faced an educated Jewish woman at the turn of the twentieth century, and to meet women who were feminist activists many years before our time.

NECHAMA LISS-LEVINSON

Inherited Ambivalence

An Israeli-American transplant struggles for a sense of home.

All of the characters in the connected stories by **Danit Brown** in ***Ask for a***

Convertible (Pantheon Books, $22.95), struggle to find an identity and a home for themselves. Chief among them is Osnat Greenberg, a hybrid Israeli-American whose dry and often hilarious voice guides us through most of this debut collection.

Osnat is 13 when her Israeli mother and American father move her from the shores of Tel Aviv to the suburbs of Michigan, where compared to her "pasty-white" American classmates, she feels "small, brown and fragile," and her name sounds too much like another word for mucus. Osnat's estrangement deepens with each story, and is never really put to rest even when she returns to Israel, which turns out not to be the paradise she has imagined. The book follows her through two decades, but the reader gets the sense that Osnat won't be feeling like an insider, anywhere, any time soon.

This is not entirely surprising given that her father, Marvin, hated living in Israel just about as much as her mother, Efrat, hates being in America—not an easy combination for a child to negotiate. When Efrat isn't on the phone with her sister in Israel, she walks around in a perpetual state of despair. The threat of her returning home casts a dark shadow over the first half of these stories, and it is Osnat who ends up suffering. Her ears are always tuned to her parents' bedroom where she overhears her mother crying or fighting with her father.

How much of Osnat's inability to integrate into American life stems from her own longing for her birthplace, and how much from her eagerness to identify with her mother's pain? Brown's insightful portrait of a mother-daughter relationship bruised by a difficult move is one of several sophisticated threads that make this book more than just another immigrant narrative.

Osnat tries to carve out her own path—she moves away from home, dates a series of men named Chris, participates in Hands Across America—but succeeding may mean losing the singular bond she shares with her mother who she fears will "accuse her of becoming one of them."

These stories' strength and originality lie in Brown's ability to capture the specifics and the nuances of the Israeli immigrant experience, which is so often qualified by a sense of impermanence. Brown perceptively shows how a child can inherit her parents' ambivalence, even mistaking it for her own.

Osnat is not the only one in these stories who struggles to fit in. Harriet, an American from Indiana, spends her childhood trying to prepare for a second Holocaust, and her 20s looking for an Israeli husband to taker her to Israel. This cast of equally lost characters, each struggling to find his or her place in the world, serves to convince us, to quote Efrat's words to her daughter, that "home isn't just about place."

MICHAL LANDO

YIVO comes to America

Buried autobiographical treasures surface now.

The nine moving and sophisticated autobiographies in ***My Future is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Jewish Immigrants*** (NYU Press, $25), translated and edited by **Jocelyn Cohen** and **Daniel Soyer**, provide new insights both into the experiences of the 2.5 million Eastern European Jews who migrated to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, and into how these immigrants understood and talked about their journey in the 1940s, years later.

The history behind these narratives is nearly as dramatic as the stories themselves. In 1942, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, an organization charged with documenting and cultivating the language and culture of Ashkenazic Jews, sponsored an autobiography contest for Jews who had immigrated to America. The contest represented an important shift in the work of YIVO, which, until 1940, had been based in Vilna and had focused its energies on the culture of Jews within Eastern Europe. When WWII forced YIVO to move to New York, the organization struggled to develop ways to complete its mission in spite of the destruction that was befalling the people it served. With this autobiography contest, YIVO made the decision to focus its attentions on the Jews of America.

For years, the 200 autobiographical entries languished in the YIVO archives. Handwritten primarily in Yiddish, this treasure-trove was all but inaccessible until the publication of this volume. Editors Jocelyn Cohen, a research associate at YIVO's Max Weinreich Center, and her husband, Daniel Soyer, a Professor of History at Fordham University, took on the daunting task of searching through these life histories and publishing the ones they deemed most representative of the experiences of the immigrant generation.

The volume's nine autobiographies include five by women. These narratives offer a window into the distinct challenges faced by female immigrants as they traveled to an unfamiliar land and, later, as they struggled to recount their stories. One particular obstacle the women faced was illiteracy, a problem rarely faced by Jewish men. Minnie Goldstein, 60 years old by the time she wrote her autobiography, learned to read and write as an adult. For Goldstein, the very fact that she succeeded in writing down her life story, and was recognized for her achievement by the YIVO judges, represented one of her greatest accomplishments. "I could not believe my ears, because I was sure that I could not write English well enough to earn an honorable mention," exclaimed Goldstein in a coda to her autobiography. "My happiness was indescribable."

The editors also include a pair of autobiographies written by Chaim and Minnie Kusnetz, a married couple who each wrote independently of their intertwined lives. Chaim, an intellectual who never wanted to get married, eventually agreed to wed his girlfriend Minnie when she was at risk of being deported. Chaim's tale focuses on his struggle to reconcile his role as a husband and provider with his idealized notion of himself as an intellectual and scholar. He mocked his wife's materialistic desires, which included the modern furniture and jewelry that he bought for her, noting unkindly that as he made the purchases, he "felt like an adult who buys a toy for a child."

When we read Minnie's narrative, however, it becomes clear that these luxu-

ries represented far more than juvenile baubles to her. For Minnie, herself a poet and an intellectual, they symbolized the end of a life of privation, her eventual sense of comfort in a new land, and a tangible token of esteem from her husband, a man who had only agreed to marry her under legal duress. Though Minnie complained that "I am so busy now with the house and child that I not only don't have time to write poems, I don't even have time to look at the newspaper," the enjoyment she received from her family and the beautiful things that she owned offered her a measure of solace for the intellectual interests she could no longer pursue. Hearing this story from the perspective of both husband and wife offers us a glimpse into how this couple synthesized their accomplishments in America, and the gendered ways in which they compensated for their disappointments.

RACHEL KRANSON

Our Reviewers

JUDY BATALION is a Canadian writer and performer living in London. Her edited collection of writing on comedy audiences will be out in 2009.

GABRIELLE BIRKNER is an editor at the Forward.

HEIDI GRALLA, a freelance writer, is a member of the Lilith board. She is a breastfeeding advocate and the mother of three breastfed children.

FRANCINE KLAGSBRUN, author of more than a dozen books and a columnist for the Jewish Week, is writing an in-depth biography of Golda Meir.

RACHEL KRANSON is a Ph.D. candidate in History and Jewish Studies at NYU and a contributing editor at Lilith.

MICHAL LANDO is a writer in Tel Aviv. Her articles have appeared in The New York Times, The Jerusalem Post and the Forward.

NECHAMA LISS-LEVINSON is a psychologist in private practice and an author. Her books include *When a Grandparent Dies: A Kid's Own Remembering Workbook for Dealing with Shiva and the Year Beyond.*

SARA N.S. MEIROWITZ studies and teaches Jewish texts and works as a freelance editor and writer in Jerusalem.

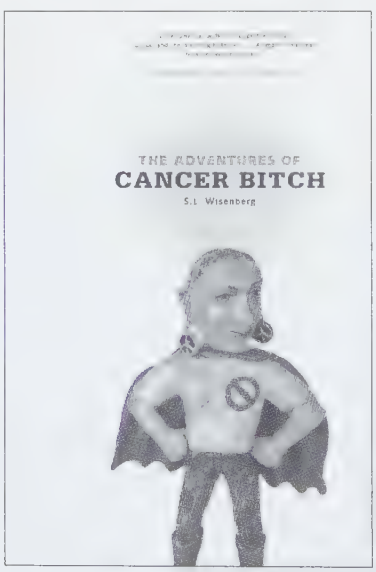
SPENCER MEROLLA lives and works in New York.

FAYE MOSKOWITZ, memoirist and short story writer, is professor of English and Creative Writing at the George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

SUSAN SAPIRO, an associate at DRG Inc., and a former Lilith intern, writes on Jewish feminist issues.

EMILY SEIFE works at Random House Children's Books. She lives in Brooklyn.

The Adventures of CANCER BITCH



by S. L. Wisenberg

"Forget the sappy little pink ribbons. When chemotherapy takes S. L. Wisenberg's hair, she turns her bald head into an antiwar billboard. Read *The Adventures of Cancer Bitch* to meet a smart, funny, big-hearted woman who questions everything from her own mortality to career envy to why nobody thinks the particulars of hair loss are as fascinating a subject for extended dinner-party conversation as she does. Along the way, Wisenberg makes you proud to think that you, too, might possibly be a cancer bitch."

—RUTH PENNEBAKER, author, *Both Sides Now*

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(continued from page 16)

for everybody's manuscript.

The success of our workshop hinges on the fact that our four-day summer retreat is mandatory. It quickly forges a sense of trust and belonging, freeing members to write about intimate things: domestic violence, loss of loved ones, or small forgotten moments with children or parents.

The women in our current group range in age from 30 to 80, and they're an interesting mix: a visual artist, a social worker, a scholar, a journalist, a physical therapist—we even have an ex-C.I.A. operative. What's most community-making, I'd have to say, are three ingredients: We're largely Jewish, we're female, and we share a drive—whether through poetry, memoir, or fiction—to tell our stories. Some in order to publish; some to preserve family histories; all to experience firsthand the healing and redemptive power of shaping an experience into a narrative.

Here's how I teach the workshop. In each session I explore one element of the writer's craft—say, "engaging the senses"—after which I assign a correspondent five-to-ten minute exercise—say, "describe a family recipe." Prompts like these generally yield potent material which students then continue to work on at home, turning rough starts into more polished pieces.

During the High Holidays, I ask the group to write about forgiveness, en exercise that builds character-development skills (and generally spiritual ones, too). One woman, a retired executive who initially intimidated me with her husky voice and razor-sharp wit, wrote a piece about her troubled relationship with a sibling. When I suggested that she then write the same piece from her sibling's point of view, the exercise cracked her open like a walnut. She not only began composing from a place that transcended old hurts, but her subsequent work presented richer characters. Each session, at least one student will exhibit such a breakthrough. Sometimes an exercise will pry open a memory, and an entirely unexpected piece comes into being.

Another element of craft that I teach is "paying attention"—how a writer goes outside of herself to better observe the particulars of dialogue and setting. This is actually a take-home assignment—I ask students to visit a favorite haunt, as though for the first time, and eavesdrop on a conversation. They then write a scene about the people they observed, using the details they've gathered to establish setting. One woman in the class, a gentle soul, insisted that she had failed at the assignment because she felt too guilty to eavesdrop. She offered in its stead a stunning poem addressed to a little boy whose photo she'd encountered in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. I was thrilled. I wanted her to respond to her world; it didn't matter how she did it.

After the brief initial exercise, we spend the balance of our time critiquing each other's submissions. I lead the discussion, following the guidelines that we established at the retreats. We begin by pointing out what's working in the piece. (A writer can't revise a piece if she doesn't know what to keep.) We then ask questions about the manuscript and/or offer ideas for revision. We are decidedly not a therapy group, and our comments address the submission as a piece of writing. That said, someone might suggest fleshing out a character, and the act of trolling for a good quality in a neglectful parent or of searching to pick up a hard truth about an idealized loved one might inspire a real-life epiphany.

The environment we've created for developing our narratives creates a community like none other I've experienced. We're multi-generational. Younger women borrow insights from older ones, and mutual enrichment is keenly felt. In the course of six months, our youngest member gave birth to her first child and our oldest died in her sleep. Bonding cross-generationally is one of our group's signature strengths and irreplaceable comforts.

And then, of course, there's the Jewish piece, which surfaces organically and consistently in our writing. I'd say that our exploration of Judaism is no less core than if we'd embarked upon a trip to Israel or studied Torah.

At the end of the day, the sturdiest thread that ties us together, though, is that we know each other's stories: the ones we tell often, and the ones that live beneath them. ■

Michelle Brafman teaches creative writing at George Washington University. Past winner of Lilith's Fiction Award, her short stories have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best New American Voices 2009.

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HAPPENING

"The Secrets"

This film by Avi Nesher ("Turn Left at the End of the World") is set in Israel's sacred city of Tzfat with its New Age element, and has an unusual soundtrack of female voices lifted in prayerful song. After her mother's death, Naomi, the learned daughter of a rabbi, postpones her arranged marriage to come to a seminary for ultra-Orthodox young women with a headmistress—barely tolerated by the local religious establishment—who believes one day there will be female rabbis. Naomi and defiant, free-spirited Michelle befriend a mysterious terminally ill woman, Anouk, and devise a secret Kabbalistic plan to help her expiate her earlier crime of passion. In the process, Naomi and Michelle fall in love, with complicated repercussions. *montereymedia.com/theatrical/films/secrets_the.html*

Feel Your Boobies®

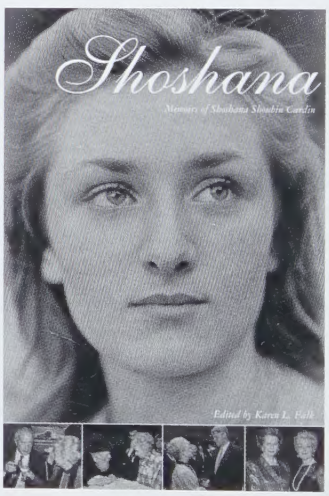
isn't quite what you'd think. This smart website is a more lighthearted than the usual way to get women young and not-so-young to act on what many already know: the importance of self-examination for early detection of breast cancer. The slogan works as a conversation-starter on a t-shirt, a billboard, a coaster at a coffee shop or on balloons at a friend's birthday party. *feelyourboobies.com*

Activists who've got religion

Healers of Our Time: Women, Faith, and Justice is a report looking at religious women's progressive gender-focused activism in social justice movements, in academia, and in popular culture. This study is the first phase of what is planned as a more comprehensive effort. (Unfortunately, Lilith is not included in their list of media... maybe in the next stage?) The report is available in print or online from the Sister Fund. *sisterfund.org*

Under the same tent: racially and ethnically diverse Jews

Want to build a broader community? In New York City, you can join groups for young adult Jews of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. There are other choices too—for parents of racially and ethnically diverse children, for Jewish parents whose children are in interracial relationships, and for interracial couples where one or both partners are Jews. The groups are co-sponsored by San Francisco's Bechollashon.org and the Jewish Board of Family and Children Services in New York City (*jbfcs.org*). Contact Judith Levitan, LCSW: jlevitan@jbfcs.org; 212-399-2685 x 219.



Fearless Shoshana

A captain of the American Jewish community, Baltimore's Shoshana Cardin has had lifelong career as a volunteer. She participated in redrafting the Maryland State Constitution, helped American women gain access to credit and greater financial security, opened the way for Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union and—speaking truth to power—reminded the world that anti-Semitism is unacceptable. *Memoirs of*

Shoshana Shoubin Cardin, published by the Jewish Museum of Maryland, chronicles this one-woman engine driving political and social change. Proceeds from the sale of the book will go to the Shoshana S. Cardin Independent Jewish High School in Baltimore. $25. *jewishmuseummd.org*

"Pro-ana" (pro-anorexia) evils online

have grown exponentially, as a result of social networking on the Internet. On the websites of these groups, people suffering from anorexia and bulimia trade tips on how to get thinner. Some, bizarrely, even compete over who will be first to get to the ultimate finish-line—death. Here are websites countering these recipes for self-destruction: *health.groups.yahoo.com/group/strongerthanthemonster* and *eatingdisorders.org*.

Girls write now

This creative writing and mentoring organization engages a community of women writers—authors, editors, educators, journalists, playwrights, publishers, advertising and PR professionals and literary agents —who provide a safe space for New York City's high school girls to develop their creative, independent voices, explore careers in professional writing, and learn how to make healthy choices in school, career and life. There are many ways you can become involved. *girlswritenow.org*.

Molly Picon

A combination showstopper and public servant, character actress and superstar, Molly Picon embodied the spirit of Yiddish theater and culture for the 20th century. She rose to fame performing in Yiddish for audiences from Argentina to Zagreb, entertained American troops in Korea and played to Jewish survivors in post-Holocaust Warsaw. She dressed as a yeshiva boy to play Yidl and an old woman to play Yente and won the hearts of audiences even if they did not speak Yiddish. "Molly Picon: Pages from a Performing Life" is an exhibition of the scrapbooks kept by this legendary performer and her husband and collaborator, Jacob Kalich. The American Jewish Historical Society through September 30, 2009 at the Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street, NYC, and also viewable online. *ajhs.org/publications/Exhibitions.cfm*.

"At Home in Utopia"

In the 1920s, a group of Jewish garment workers, believing they could create a radical new American dream committed to equality, justice and beauty, left behind the tenements to build cooperative apartment complexes in the green, spacious borough of the Bronx. A film by Michal Goldman and Ellen Brodsky focuses on the United Workers Cooperative Colony known as "the Coops"—the grassroots and member-driven member-driven housing housing cooperatives where many of the residents were Communist or sympathetic to the communist movement. They were part of a mass movement strong enough to get 24 states to enact emergency legislation against morgage foreclosures. The film tracks the rise and fall of the Coops from 1920s to the 1950s, showing lives lived with courage across the barriers of race and ethnicity, foreshadowing the struggles and triumphs of the 1960s and today. *pbs.org/athomeinutopia*

Food Fights

In the winter of 1917, times were also tough. Rising food prices drove people to desperate measures. Rioters attacked food shops and burned pushcarts on New York's Lower East Side and in sections of Brooklyn. Women took to the streets to protest rising prices of kosher meat just before Passover. Playwright and director Melissa Fendell tells their story in her new play, "Give Us Bread," (below) produced by The Anthropologists, which will have a reading and panel discussion on April 30 at New York's Tenement Museum, *tenement.org* For more on this historic women's action against price gouging, visit *thefoodriotproject.blogspot.com*.

For events and projects taking place between issues of Lilith, and to listen to podcasts and respond to blog posts, check out WHAT'S NEW on the Lilith homepage: *www.Lilith.org* where you can also sign up for Lilith's free e-mail newsletter. Send suggestions for this section to *info@Lilith.org*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

BEAUTIFUL, for a *FEMINIST*

by JENNIFER BAUMGARDNER

Dazzling, streaky-haired Gloria Steinem once said something along the lines of "No one thought I was so beautiful until I said I was a feminist." Steinem was, I think, riffing on the popular myth about feminists: that we are ugly, too grotesque to get a man—and therefore our habits of running for office, landing a seat on the Supreme Court, or writing books are merely elaborate justifications for having no date on a Friday night. Steinem was also deflecting the notion that she is more beautiful, and thus more powerful, than other women. Helen Gurley Brown once remarked to me, "Well, she would say that—because she's gorgeous. She doesn't know what it's like *not* to be gorgeous."

As a child, I was definitely a Helen. The first time I remember feeling consistently pretty was age 10, when I would create elaborate hairstyles in the bathroom while my five-year-old sister, Jessica, gazed at me from her perch on the toilet, enraptured. I had boys looking at me; I was pals with Brita and DayNa and the other precociously lovely blonds. I had admirers—or at least I had my little sister. I don't recall when I first considered myself a feminist. I grew up with Ms. magazine and a mother who gave me a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* when I was 11, when she caught wind of a book report I handed in about *Valley of the Dolls*. I was born into "Free to Be!" "That Girl!" "Mary Tyler Moore!" "Maude!" I wrote letters to the editor of the newspaper in support of abortion rights at age 13. I was proud of being smart. On the other hand, beauty loomed large in my young psyche. I bought all of the fashion magazines and found *Ms.* dry. By the end of high school, I knew I *shouldn't* care how I looked, because the content of my character was much more important, but I sensed that I was less vulnerable to being seen as a boy, lesbian, or outcast if I was also pretty.

My desire to be beautiful was rooted in my desire to be powerful. There were lots of ways to have power, but it seemed important to have "looks power" first. This was my secret self. My real self was being a smart snob in vintage clothes. Which is why I'm so surprised that I ended up in the World of Wheels pageant in 1987. The World of Wheels was a car show, held at the civic center in Fargo, but they also had a beauty pageant called Miss World of Wheels. I was, if I haven't made this clear yet, a theater geek. I sang songs from *Fiddler on the Roof* on weekends; I loved Liza. The other women—many were older, in their early twenties—in the pageant had the five Bs: bronze tans, boobs, and big, blond bangs. They wore bikinis; I donned a fashion-forward gold lamé one-piece. My sister Jessica was in the audience and recalls having a "lamb to the slaughter" sensation when I took to the stage for the interview portion. When I was asked whether I liked to tan (seriously, that *was* the question), I answered, "I'm sorry, but no one should tan. It causes skin cancer."

I forgot about competing (and losing) in the World of Wheels for years. I went to college, where I actually got a great deal of attention for my looks. By the end of sophomore year, I was also a rabid college feminist. First, we protested the mutilated dolls that a male artist made, learning we could be a united front of outrage and could scare people. Later, drunk on power and flat beer, we would talk at frat parties about how women should have guns and the only good rapist was a dead rapist. We were hot bundles of tough, miniskirted contradictions. After college, I moved to New York City. The city, like feminism, offered an exciting new value system—beauty was measured differently, your whole self was taken into account. I no longer felt shame about the part of me that longed to be powerful in that most basic, most perishable female way—the part of me that wanted to be beautiful.

My desire to be beautiful was rooted in my desire to be powerful.

For a long time, I couldn't talk about things like the World of Wheels pageant, or being told to lose weight at the modeling agencies I went to when I first moved to New York. I'd say that before I became fully conscious, I engaged in tribal rituals of female debasement before the male gaze. What I didn't say is this: It wasn't competing that felt so bad. It was trying and failing. Getting chosen to do the modeling for Sephora or *Moda Italia* felt great. I can admit that now. After all, feminism can't say there is no place in its philosophy for beauty or raw power. To survive, it has to be like New York—to glory in beauty, but never value a woman just by that measure.

Recently, my book *Look Both Ways* was reviewed in a fashion magazine, the kind I read as a teen. The writer referred to me as "by far, the hottest of the Third Wave feminists." I felt a little zing of accomplishment. I was beautiful—for a feminist. ■

A version of this memoir appeared in About Face: Women Write about What They See When They Look in the Mirror *(Seal Press, 2008).*

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